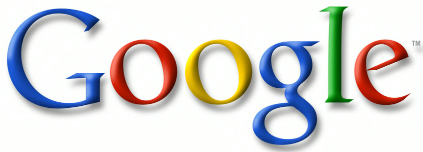

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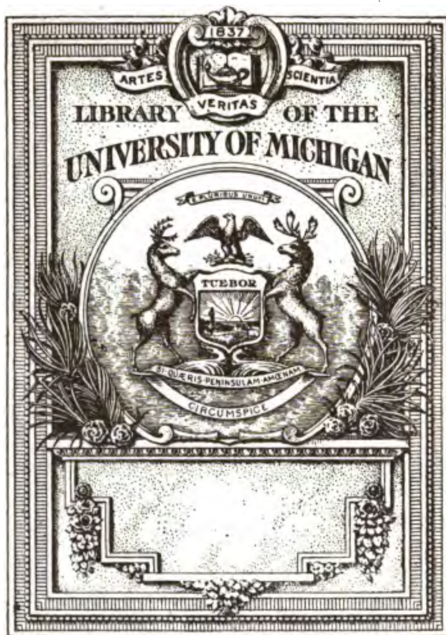
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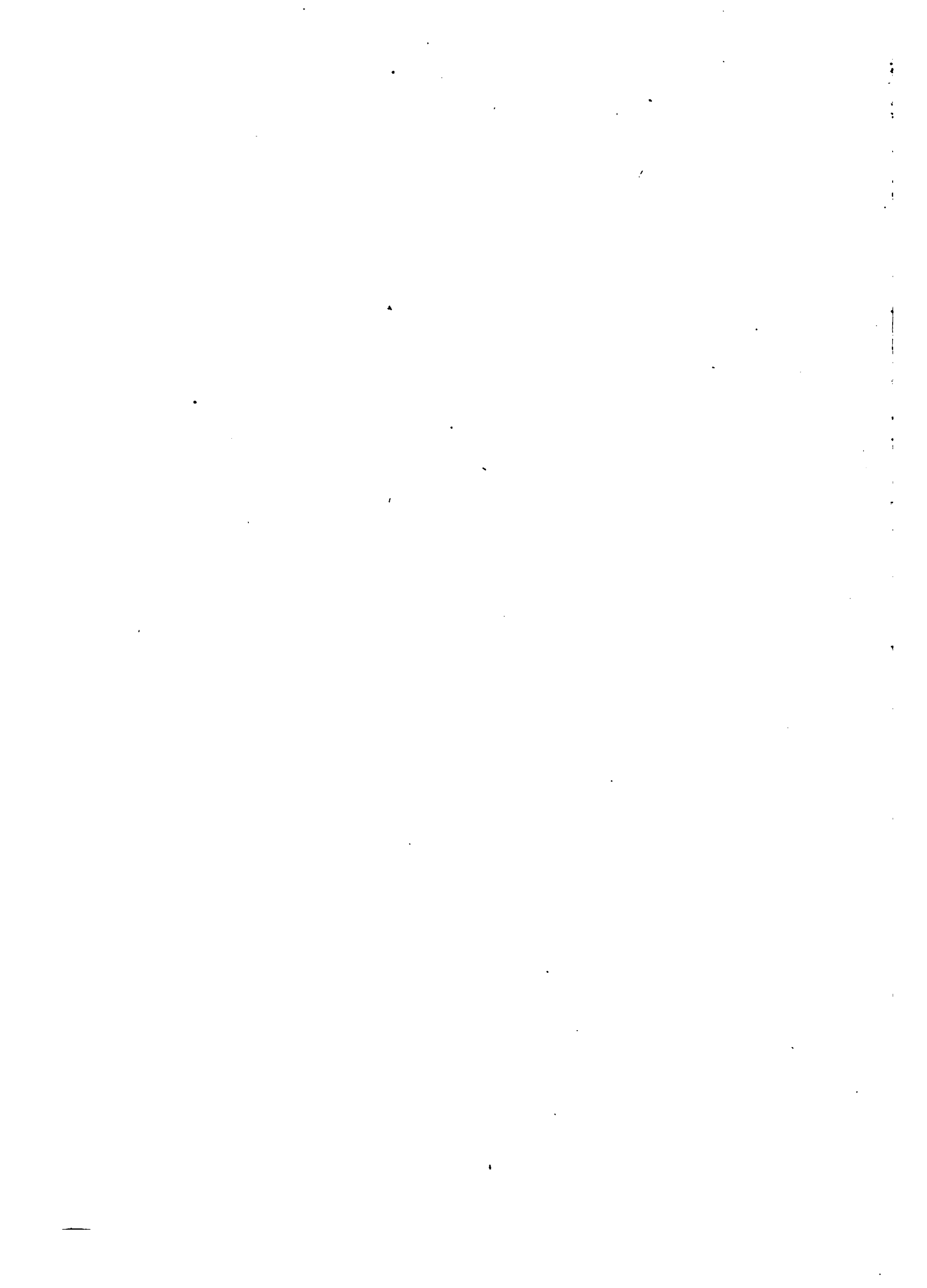

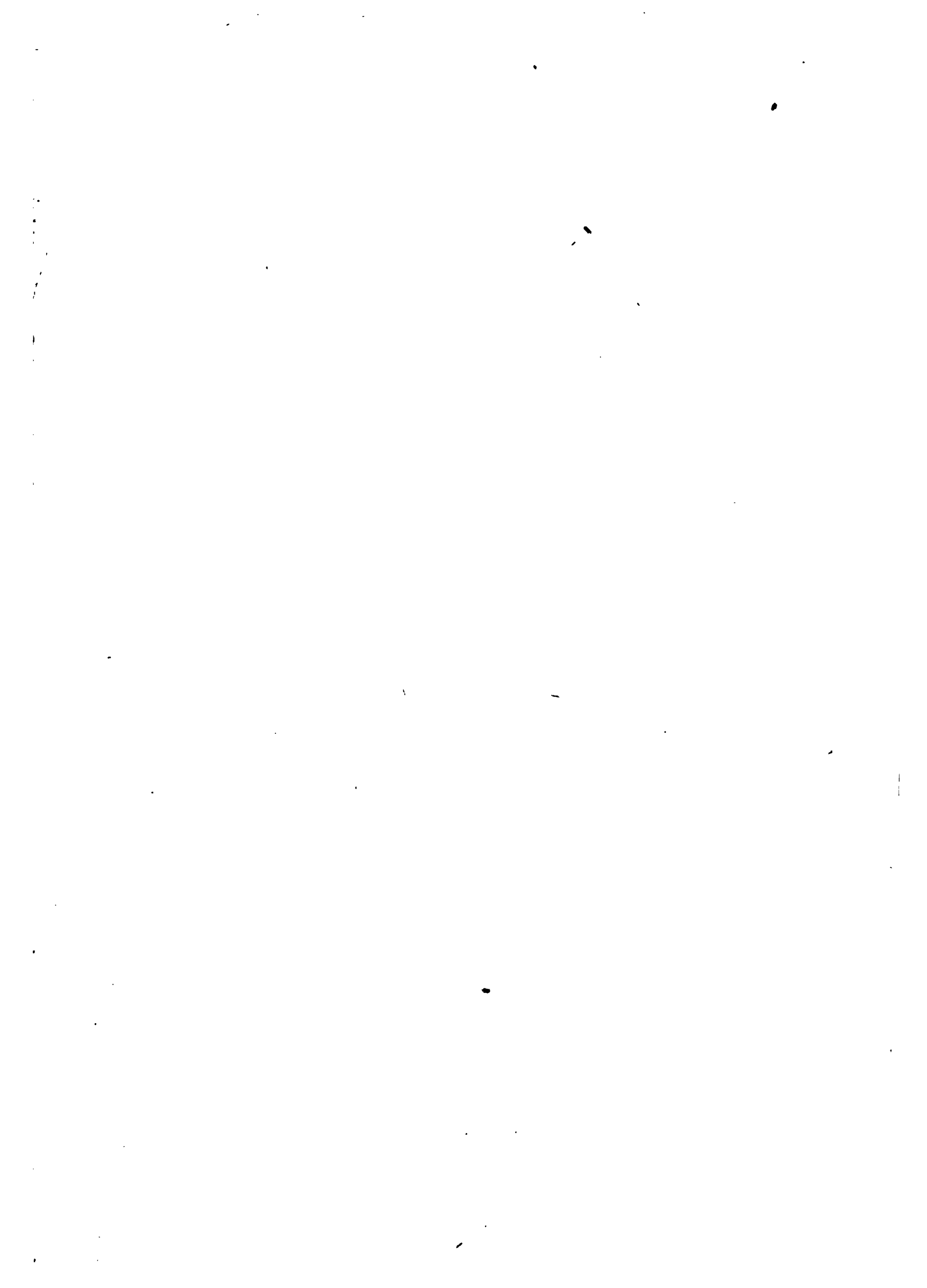

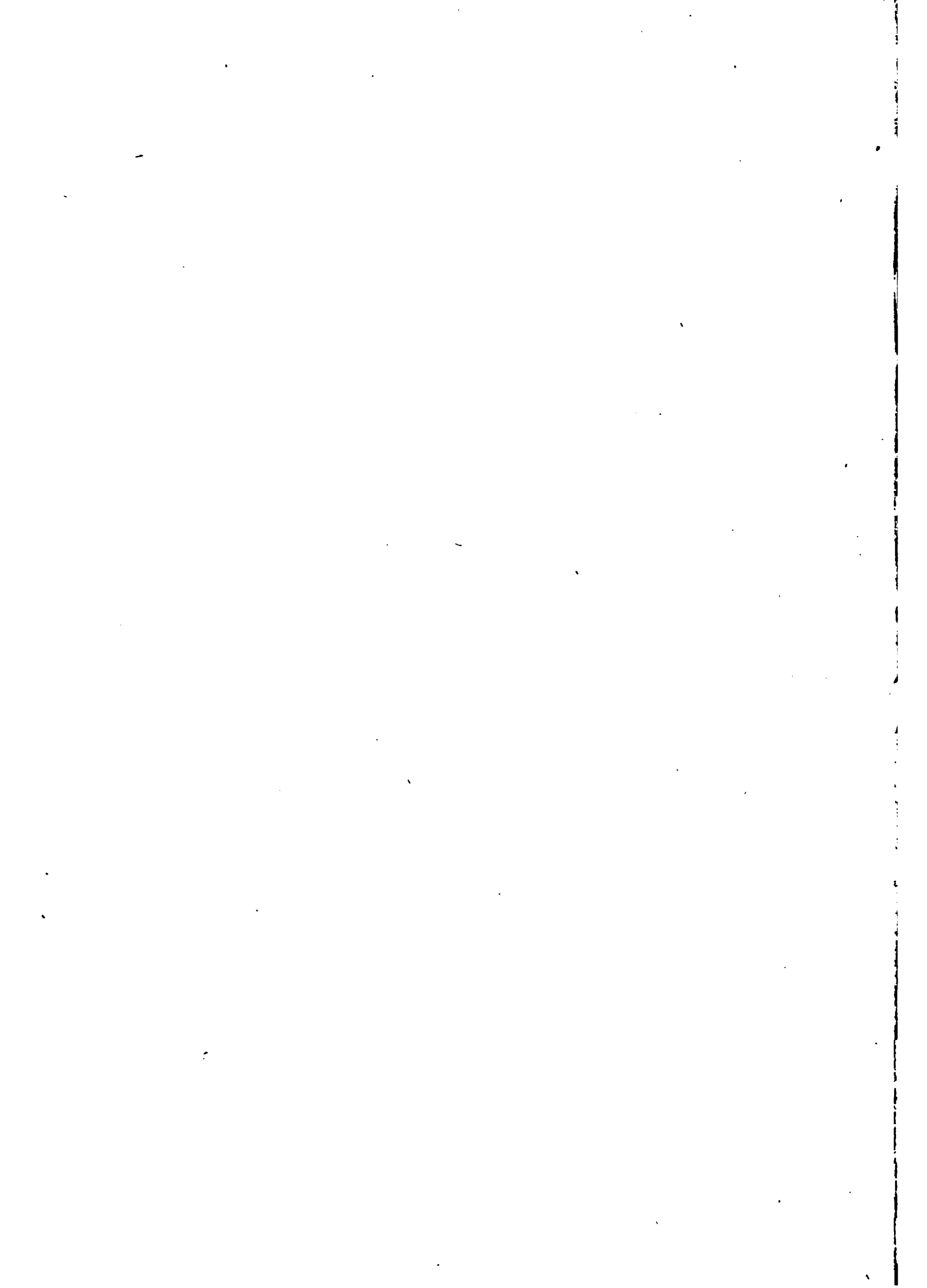

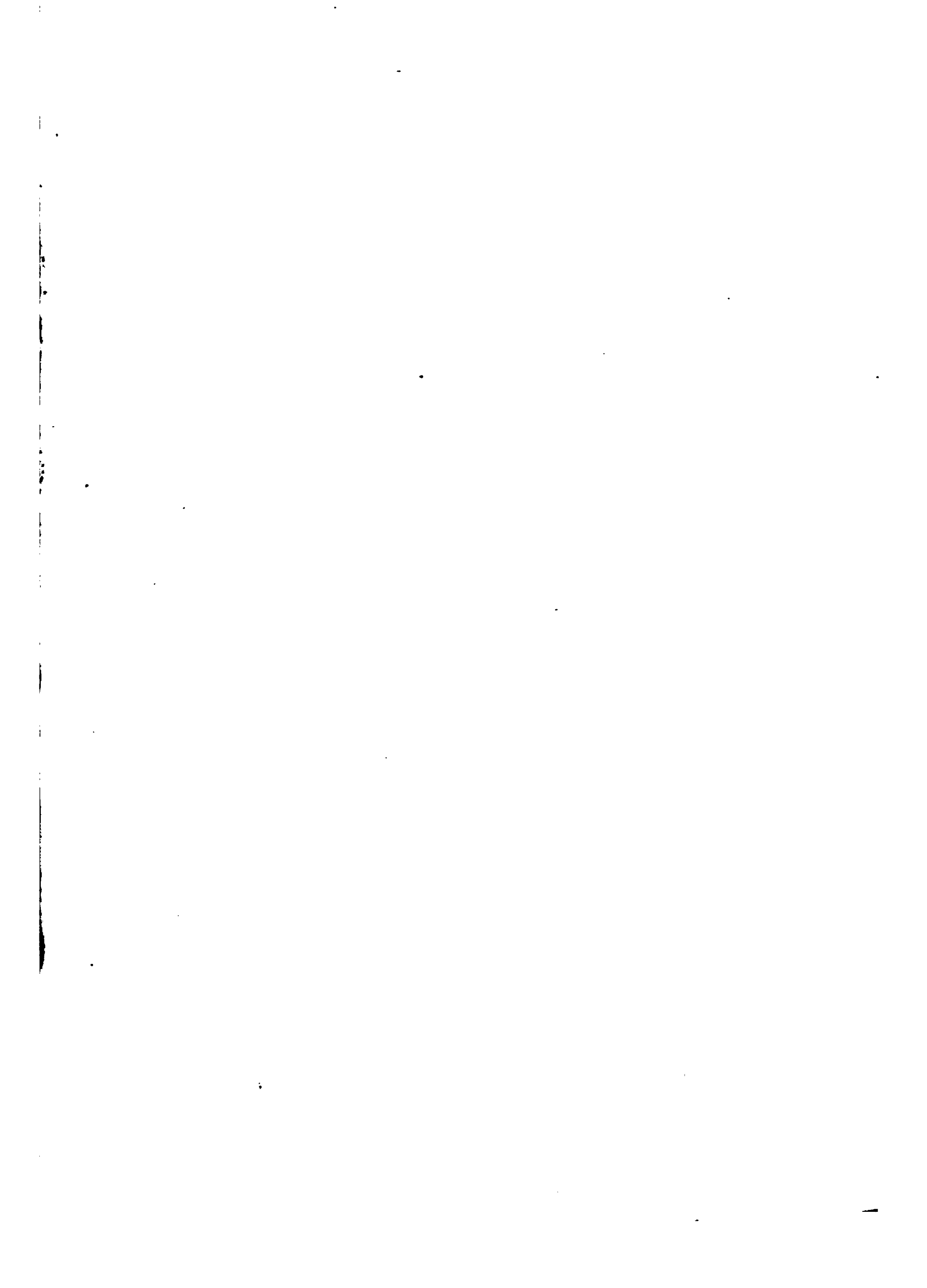

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c 2.

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

BY

FRANCIS GRIBBLE

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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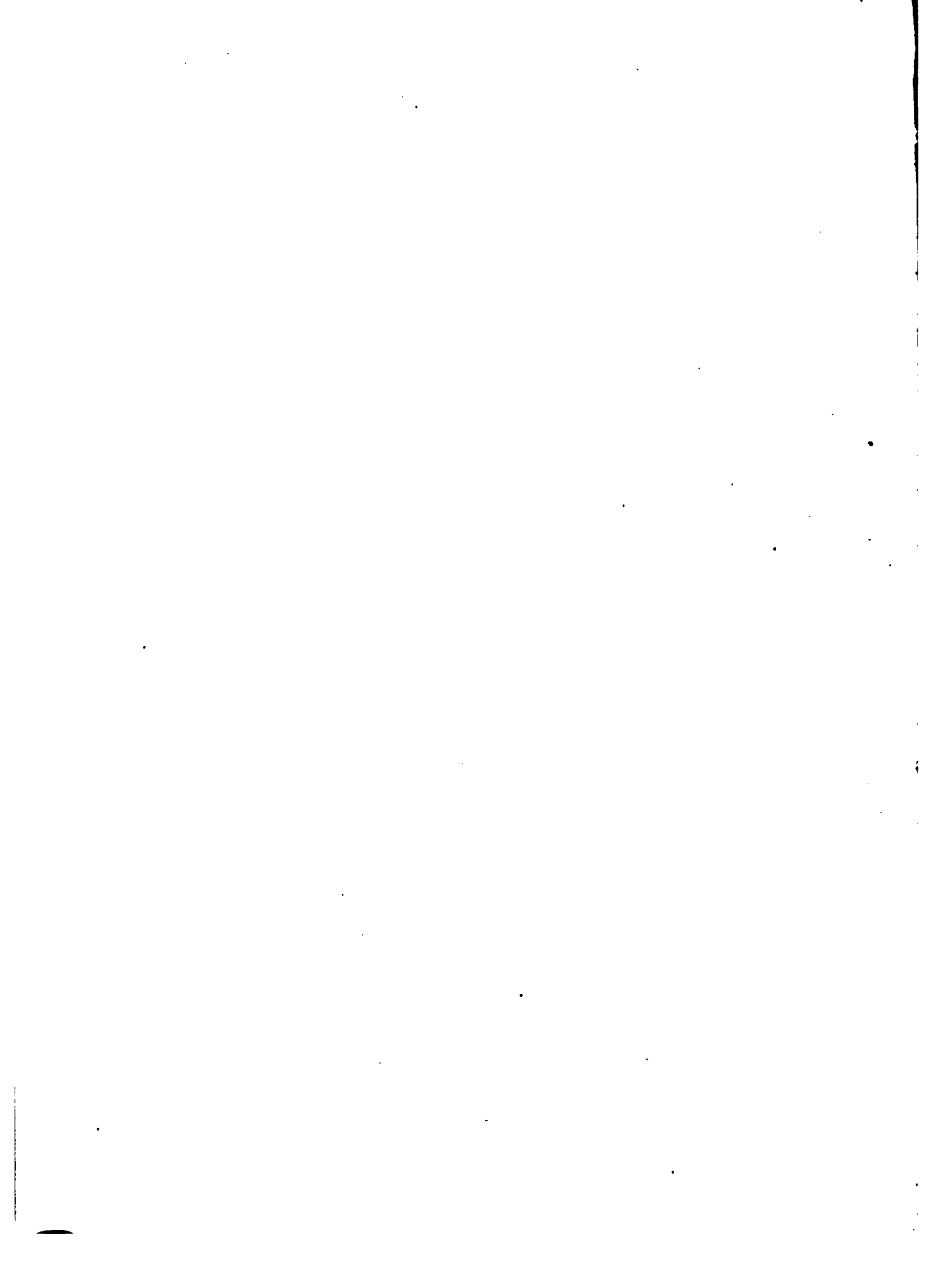

THE THINGS THAT MATTER.

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

CHAPTER I.

A CONFESSION.

THEY had been married for four years and an autumn, and had not been unhappy. Many in the little world in which they moved felt envious of their happiness. Yet, in the dusk of a certain November afternoon, when they were sitting together in the fire-light, and the glow of the coals shone upon her face, turning her auburn hair to the likeness of a halo, Eleanor startled her husband suddenly with this strange saying :

" I 've been thinking, Walter. It 's an odd thing—is n't it ?—that you and I have never fallen in love with each other."

Yes, truly it was a strange thing for a wife to say to her husband, after four years of married life. For, when husbands and wives have lived so long together, one expects them to have chosen

one of three alternatives: to love each other wholly; or to dislike each other frankly; or to go their separate ways indifferent to each other. Whichever the situation, they must accept it, one supposes, as a blessing or a burden, according to the case, and not troubling any longer to analyse their feelings or account for them. But Eleanor analysed, attacking the problem philosophically, though as yet she had hardly got beneath the surface of it. And, indeed, it was a problem which even an older philosopher, fortified by cynicism, might have found it hard enough to solve.

The merest stranger if he could have peeped in upon them through the window, would have thought just as their friends thought, that Nature had designed them to make each other's happiness.

Walter Temple was a painter. Not a struggling painter, put to hard shifts to pay his way and keep appearances respectable, but a painter who had succeeded early, who sold his pictures, and whose future seemed assured. Not a painter who had won popularity by pandering to the whims and sentiments of the inartistic multitude, but a painter favourably regarded even by that new clique of critics who sneer at Mr. Orchardson's "anecdotes," and Mr. Leader's "tea-trays," declare that Sir Frederick Leighton's works "do not exist," and

puzzle an uneducated public by their frequent references to Monet, and Manet, and Ingres, and Puvis de Chavannes. Merely for the sake of his talent and distinction many women would have been glad to have him for a husband. Moreover, his character and temperament were of the kind that are supposed to wear well in married life. If he had the artistic temperament, at least he was free from the more serious vices which that temperament so often carries with it. That is to say, he was seldom irritable or moody, and never rude of speech, and he did not, except on rare occasions, and with leave duly granted, turn night into day at the Savage or the Hogarth, and it had never even occurred to his wife to be jealous of his models. Finally, if he was not a handsome man, at least he was a man whom a woman could believe to be handsome when he smiled—the sort of man, in short, with whom women naturally expected other women to be in love.

Of Eleanor, again, the truest description that can be given is that she was the sort of woman with whom men would naturally expect other men to be in love. Indeed,—men being more prone to take the initiative in this regard than women,—many men actually were, or thought themselves, in love with her, though she abjured flirtation, and had never

shown encouragement to any of them. Her features were regular and somewhat of the Grecian type, though the mouth was large enough to hint at a certain individuality of character; her complexion was brighter and fresher than is usual with London girls. Auburn hair waved in natural curls over her forehead; and her violet eyes were eloquent—the mirror of a grave and earnest mind. In figure she was a little—a very little—taller than the average; and in bearing she was dignified and self-possessed, with the air of a woman who is quite sure of herself, and has no fear that she will ever make mistakes.

The worst fault that her worst enemy could have found with her appearance was that she "looked too clever," for it is a sad truth that, with women, breadth of brow is incompatible with perfect beauty. But the wavy hair, dexterously arranged, obscured this fault, and when men heard her talk, they no longer considered it a fault. For Eleanor's voice was melodious and sympathetic, and she talked to men of the things in which men are interested, and not as the women talk whose thoughts are in the nursery or in the bonnet shop. Moreover, she understood the artistic temperament to a certain extent, having herself a share of it, and, so far as she understood it, she preferred it to all

other temperaments. She wrote a little. One of her books had been described as a work of genius by the *Daily Chronicle*, so that her husband had reason to be proud of her. Altogether, her friends thought she was an ideal artist's wife—especially an ideal wife for such an artist as Walter Temple.

Such, as they seemed to the world and to each other, were the husband and the wife ; and, at the moment when Eleanor suddenly broke silence, all the surroundings and circumstances were favourable to romance.

They sat in the little room opening out of the studio where Walter had been working all the afternoon,—a dainty little room, after the Moorish style, with heavy curtains, and luxurious divans, and rich sombre draperies. A great screen hid the door and shut out the draughts, and quaint lamps of stained glass and filigree-work hung by brass chains from the ceiling, and antique ornaments and weapons were fastened to the walls. The dusk was just beginning, but they had not troubled to turn on the gas, so that there was no light but that of the fire that shone on Eleanor's hair, and made a halo of it. To anyone who could have looked in on them, it would have seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should have been sitting close together—her head nestling on his

shoulder, and his hand playing with the loose locks of hair that kissed her neck.

Instead of that, they sat apart, at opposite sides of the little room, just as a brother and a sister would, and Walter had just rolled up and lit a cigarette, when Eleanor startled him with her strange saying :

" I 've been thinking, Walter. It 's an odd thing—is n't it?—that you and I have never fallen in love with each other."

It was not only a strange but a foolish thing to say. She should have known that a man does not care to be analysed in this way, even if he be a great artist, and therefore interested in the analysis of human conduct ; that the discomfort of being analysed is like the discomfort of being photographed, while the fear of an unflattering result is greater.

Yet Eleanor was not speaking petulantly, or unkindly, or complainingly. Her grievance, if she had a grievance, was not, she felt, against Walter, but against the nature of things and the hidden powers by which the nature of things is overruled and guided. It was unreasonable, she knew, for a woman to be angry with her husband, when he was a good husband, because she is not in love with him. If there was blame, then she herself

must share it. Therefore she spoke half philosophically, half playfully, and with only the very faintest undertone of regret or pathos in her accent.

"It 's an odd thing, Walter—is n't it—that you and I have never fallen in love with each other."

He did not answer. How should a man reply to such a question—sprung upon him suddenly—unless he either wishes to quarrel, or is prepared to say that he, for his part, is in love, has always been in love? Perhaps Eleanor had hardly expected him to answer, for she continued, after the very slightest pause:

"It is n't as if we ever quarrelled——"

"I hope we are never going to quarrel, Eleanor," he said.

"And it is n't as if we did n't like each other. We do like each other, Walter, don't we?"

"Surely, surely, Eleanor, we have always been the very best of friends."

He was wishing heartily that she would talk of something else—of the new picture that he was just beginning for the Academy, for instance, or even of the weather, but he knew that it would hurt her if he said anything irrelevant to change the subject.

Moreover, the theme fascinated Eleanor, and she would not leave it.

"Yes, yes," she said, "that 's the strangest part

of it. We 've always got on well, we 've always liked each other ever since we were boy and girl together. Only we never fell in love as other people do. It was awfully good of you to marry me, Walter, when you were n't in——"

"Eleanor!"

This in a tone that seemed to warn her from a forbidden subject.

"No, I know I ought n't to say that. You asked me not to, once before. Still, I was really very grateful to you. It was a very dreadful sort of life from which you saved me. I could never have been happy in it; and I quite thought we should have fallen in love with each other long before this. Only we never have. I wonder why it is."

And he, too, wondered. Or rather he remembered how he used to wonder once—how he had thought they might create a passion by the act of counterfeiting it, and how he had gradually resigned himself to think that passion was not one of the things that Eleanor was born to understand. But that was long ago, and now when she paused as though to give him the opportunity of offering a suggestion, he could offer none.

She continued as though a happy thought had struck her:

"Perhaps it is just because we were boy and

girl together that we 've never done more than like each other very much. Perhaps love can't grow out of liking, as I fancied. But I think sometimes that, if we 'd been sprung upon each other suddenly, after we were grown up, we could hardly have failed to fall in love. I should have been so dazzled by your distinction; and you—well, perhaps you would have thought me pretty."

This was his chance of saying something amiable that might interrupt a conversation that embarrassed him. He clutched at it.

"But I think that now. I have always thought that, dear," he protested.

The interruption did not serve its purpose.

"Yes, yes, I know," she answered. "You think so as an artist, and I 'm very glad you do. But then perhaps you might have thought so as a man. There 's a difference, you know, Walter—a tremendous difference."

Of course he knew it, seeing that it was a difference that he himself had wished to bridge—a difference that he would have bridged, he told himself, if she had helped him. But he did not say so. It seemed simpler to go on listening, nervously rolling cigarettes the while. And Eleanor went on talking, attacking this terrible subject from yet another side.

" I 'm sure," she said, " that the people we know would be perfectly amazed if we were to go and tell them that we were n't in love."

There was grim humour in the idea of making a public declaration of such a sort that could not but appeal to Walter. A smile crossed his face as he repeated :

" Very possibly they would. It would certainly be a somewhat singular thing to tell people, when so many other subjects of conversation are available."

But the humour was not visible to Eleanor. She was too much in earnest ; and she went on pouring out the thoughts that had long been gathering in her mind. Her eyes, as she spoke, looked straight into the fire, as though they sought for pictures there, and her speech was in essence a soliloquy, though in form she still addressed her husband.

" Of course, of course. One would n't tell them really. Truths are things too sacred to be always told. But you know what I mean to say. I mean to say that there are so many reasons obvious to all the world why you and I ought to be in love. Consider them."

He had considered them—four years ago ; but it surprised him that she also had thought the matter out.

"Look at yourself, for instance," she continued. "You 're clever, you 're successful, you 're distinguished. You 're the sort of man whom men admire, and women like. You 're kind and gentle, and attentive. More than that, you don 't treat me like a child, as so many husbands treat their wives; but you take me seriously, make a companion of me, and you don't pretend, as some husbands do, that your art—the chief thing in your life—is something that your wife must not expect to understand. In fact you have all the qualities that, in the abstract, I most admire."

Something in the tone of her voice, which sounded dreamy and far away from the world of actualities, seemed to make it superfluous either to acknowledge or deprecate her praise of him. He sat still, with his head thrown back on the divan, and his eyes half closed, and listened.

"And then look at me. I believe that I have most of the qualities that you admire in the abstract too."

"All of them, Eleanor," he murmured softly. For the something that he sought in vain in her was something indefinable; and it was impossible for him to tell her how he missed it.

She hardly heard him, but swept on:

"Some of them, at any rate, I know I have. To

begin with—it 's a little thing, perhaps, but still it counts—to begin with, I 'm not ugly, and I do know how to dress well without looking like a fashion-plate, and I 'm not one of the women who dress dowdily at home. In the second place, I don't, like some artists' wives, don the things that jar upon an artist's taste. I know one artist's wife, for instance, who goes into her husband's studio and drapes the lamps with art muslins. Of course one would n't expect an artist to be in love with a woman who brought art muslin into the studio."

Walter smiled a little. The introduction of art muslin into the studio is not a quality admired in the abstract by any artist. It would have been cruel to remind her that some artists can bear with it in the concrete, and be happy.

"And then I 'm clever, Walter—clever enough to understand you."

She thought so, having still to learn the truth that a man is nearly always more complex than a woman thinks, for the good reason that he has lived more and does not talk so much.

"I understand you, and when a man finds that he does not love his wife, the root of the trouble is mostly that she does n't understand him."

And this too she honestly believed. For how was Eleanor, with the little experience of life that

even a clever woman gets, to know that there are limits to men's desire to be understood by women; that most men desire women to understand them only in so far as they explain themselves; that to understand too much is almost as dangerous as not to understand at all? So she went on:

"It must be terrible for an artist not to be understood; and it so often happens. I know a woman—you know her too—who, when her husband's genius was at last recognised, went about telling people that she was so glad because now they would be able to send the boys to Eton instead of Haileybury. Think of that! Picture the humiliation of it! A great artist's greatest triumph valued only because it will enable one to send the boys to Eton instead of Haileybury. I 've never been like that. I 've never thought of a work of art as a means to buy me pretty hats, and frocks to wear, and prettily furnished rooms to sit in. No, I value the art because it is an art. I have my own art, and therefore I can understand. So you are able to talk about your art to me, just as you talk about it to other men. You do talk about it to me; you like to talk about it. You 've often told me that my criticisms are helpful and suggestive. We always get on so well together; we 're the best companions in the world. And yet, and yet——"

There was a pause—perhaps a little break in her voice—before she said it :

" And yet neither of us has ever fallen in love. It 's just "—she laughed as she spoke, a hysterical little laugh—" it 's just as if each of us was waiting for the other to begin."

Then, after a pause, she laughed again—a more natural laugh this time—and added :

" How ridiculous of me to talk to you like that. You 'll be thinking I 'm hysterical. But I 'm not, and I won't do it again. And now I think I 'll go and dress for dinner."

CHAPTER II.

LOOKING BACKWARD.

"IT 'S an odd thing—is n't it?—that you and I have never fallen in love with each other."

The words had fallen on Walter Temple's ears with all the sudden shock of sharp surprise; and the long personal monologue of which they were the prelude had surprised him even more. Three years before it would have tortured him, seeming a faithful echo of his own disquiet. But, three years before, the question had seemed to have no interest for Eleanor; and now he was so used to the knowledge that his wife only liked him and that he only liked his wife, that he had long ceased to see in the situation anything calling for remark. It was not a situation to talk about, but to make the best of.

And the best was not so bad. After all they had been happy together—quietly and placidly if not actively and passionately happy. How many married couples of five years' standing could say more?

How many, indeed, could say as much? Only a few of the most fortunate—that, though he did not precisely formulate it, was his line of thought; and therefore his wife's question—the question which he had not answered—had amazed him.

But the amazement died away, and he did not torture himself with vain attempts to solve a problem which he had long since abandoned as insoluble. In fact, as the days passed and Eleanor did not renew the subject, the matter almost faded from his mind.

He had so many other things to think about. In particular the great subject picture which he was preparing for the Academy absorbed him, and he had no leisure to let violent emotions enter into and distract his private life. Emotion, he would have told himself, may be to the artist as the breath of life, but there are none the less limits to his need of it. What he wants is to remember emotion in tranquillity, and not to have fresh emotions constantly breaking in and interfering with his work. Consequently Walter remembered Eleanor's talk with him as little as he could; and that was singularly little.

" Artistic temperament, I suppose," he murmured to himself, when the recollection presented itself, once or twice, an uninvited guest; and, resting

contented with the formula because he could not be troubled to probe the matter to the bottom, went back to his work and thought no more about it.

But Eleanor's case was very different. What she had said to her husband was not said on the sudden impulse of the moment, though she had spoken abruptly and without preface to prelude what was coming. Her speech was the outcome of thoughts that had troubled her brain for many months—thoughts that had, at the first, been little more than idle fancies, but had grown, and grown, and grown, until at last they so possessed her that she could control herself no longer but had been obliged to speak.

Morbid thoughts? Most people would probably have said so if they could have read them. But Eleanor had her answer ready.

In imagination she pictured how she would vindicate herself against the charge.

"You are horribly morbid to-night, Eleanor," she fancied Walter saying to her, as she was sure he would, if she ventured to talk to him again as she had talked on that November afternoon.

And then she heard herself replying that what was really morbid was her previous placidity, and that now she was only struggling to be human—struggling and almost beginning to succeed.

But she was afraid to say again the things that she had said that day, so that this particular bit of dialogue was only rehearsed, not spoken. Yet though she was afraid to speak again, the same troubling thoughts agitated and pursued her.

"To know in one's mind—to be able to prove to oneself by every argument of logic—that one's husband is the one man in all the world with whom, even if he were not one's husband, one ought to be in love! To know that, and get to feel in one's heart that one can do no more than admire him and like him very much—what a situation!"

So she put it to herself, and sometimes, in spite of her pain, found a grim irony in the situation obliging her to smile. But after the smile tears always followed. For there was another question which she was driven irresistibly to ask herself.

"If I can't love him, does n't it prove that I am incapable of loving? Have n't I perhaps given myself so wholly to this intellectual life that now no other life is possible for me, and I am a poor maimed human soul, for whom the best thing that life contains can never be?"

The thought tortured her, and she wondered with a painful wonder. Often she would sit alone for hours, looking into her own soul, searching its secret places, trying to drag its hidden things to

light, or else letting her mind stray back over the past pages of her life, tracing, step by step, the stages by which she had grown to be the woman that she was, seeking in her past some clue to the explanation of her present.

And what a different life the old life was, bathed in how different an atmosphere from the life that she was living now. It was four years and an autumn since it had ended, and she had driven away to the new life, pursued by rice and slippers and good wishes and congratulations.

Four years and an autumn since the old life had ended. Yet it seemed to her that she could still remember every day of it—its humours and trivialities as well as its facts of serious import—and, as she sat there in her little boudoir, opening from the studio, with her hands clasped behind her head, and her eyes fixed upon the fire, it was as though a transformation scene took place. The little room and its furniture—its hangings, its lamp, its pictures, and its ornaments—all faded from her vision, and instead of them she saw only the narrow streets and the old-fashioned red-brick houses of the little provincial town where the years of her childhood had been spent.

Barnstaple—that is the name of the place to which her imaginings had carried her.

It is a town that lies asleep—has lain asleep for centuries—in the north of Devon. A pretty town, prettily placed, with tall wooded hills behind it, dotted with country seats, and a river sweeping past it, through broadening meadows, to the sand-hills and the sea.

There are ten thousand people in Barnstaple, and they have lived there all their lives, and so did their fathers and their grandfathers before them for many generations. For industries they have a lace factory and a furniture factory and some paper-mills, and a considerable trade on market day in butter, eggs, and poultry. Sometimes by accident a boy is born in Barnstaple with more of the spirit of enterprise and adventure than the other boys. So soon as he is of an age to do so, he gets up and goes away to seek his fortune among strangers. But it is a rare thing for a stranger to come to Barnstaple to take his place, so that, the birth-rate exceeding the death-rate as it should, the population neither increases nor diminishes. So long as the oldest inhabitant can remember there have always been ten thousand people there.

They are a kindly, simple, unsophisticated folk, wearing old-fashioned garments, and clinging tenaciously to the old-fashioned principles of human

conduct—as that a man should go to church on Sundays, and should love his own wife and not his neighbour's—and guarding the gates of the temple of virtue with their tongues. Thus, for example, if a man goes to church too seldom, they say he is an atheist ; and if, at the Yeomanry Ball, he dances more than three times with his neighbour's wife, they say that he is in the habit of meeting her secretly in Raleigh Lane. These are their merits. Their faults, if they have any, are a certain narrowness of view, a certain inability to see things in their true proportion, and to perceive that the things that happen at Barnstaple are not the things of the most real importance to the world.

Such were the people in whose midst Eleanor grew up. She owed it to her father that she did not grow up to be like them. For her mother had died when she was a little child, and she and her father lived alone together in a small white house on Pilton Bridge.

She was Eleanor Daunt in those days, and her father was known to the neighbourhood as Dr. Daunt, though he had a right to the more high-sounding title of Emeritus Professor. He had professed literature and logic at one of the minor Scottish universities and, at the end of an active intellectual life, had come to Barnstaple to spend

his closing days in peace. His doctor had told him that quiet would be good for him ; and, as he owned the little house at Pilton Bridge, and found a difficulty in letting it, he came to live in it instead.

Their life, on the whole, Eleanor remembered, had been rather a lonely life. Emeritus Professor Daunt had not been popular in Barnstaple. It was hardly to be expected that he would, for he made no effort to conciliate the local prejudices. For one thing, he rented no pew in the parish church, and, as the phrase went, "neglected his religious opportunities." That, at the outset, was a grave social disqualification. Not quite so grave, perhaps, as if he had gone to chapel, but still very grave indeed.

Moreover, Dr. Daunt was not sufficiently respectful of the opinions of people who had lived in Barnstaple a great deal longer than he had ; and was as full of the pride of intellect at sixty-five as some men are at twenty-two. That is to say, he was impatient of stupidity, and apt to be overbearing in its presence. Nothing amused him better than to expose the local sophisms, and to brush the local idols from their pedestals. He did not mean, perhaps, to be unkind, but he behaved very much as if he did.

There was the case, for instance, of old Mr. Masterton of Crescent Hill, who was supposed to know more about astronomy than other people because his telescope was the largest that had ever been seen in Barnstaple.

"I have yet to learn," said Dr. Daunt, "that a man's knowledge of the heavenly bodies is necessarily conditioned by the diameter of the lens through which he looks at them."

And afterwards he proceeded to engage Mr. Masterton in conversation upon the transit of Venus, and so gave offence because Jupiter's moons and Saturn's rings were the only departments of astronomy in which Mr. Masterton had specialised.

That was bad enough; but even worse was the Professor's sacrilegious handling of the Curate—the Reverend Paul Devine.

Mr. Devine had preached a sermon in which he had denounced the doctrine of evolution in no measured terms on the strength of certain information picked up from the foot-notes of the Speaker's Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Two days afterwards Dr. Daunt tackled Mr. Devine on Comparative Embryology before a whole room full of people, and when it was quite clear that Mr. Devine did not even know what Comparative Em-

bryology was, he led him apart from the others and tapped him in a fatherly way upon the chest, and whispered confidentially:

"Young man, if you will take an old man's advice, you will preach less, and read more."

The story got about as all such stories did at Barnstaple, and the comment of the people was that they had always suspected that Dr. Daunt was an atheist, but now they were quite sure of it.

Incidents of this kind naturally did not cause Emeritus Professor Daunt to be beloved. But, while he was rough and truculent to his neighbours, to Eleanor he was never anything but kind and gentle. He loved her and was proud of her, and delighted to think that she was growing up to be different from other girls.

In fact it was his chief delight to teach her to be different from other girls. He guided her reading and gave her wider interests than they had; he would not let her go to school for fear lest she should fall into their ways of thought. Above all he told her—repeating the truth until it sounded like a formula—that Barnstaple was not the world, but that there was a great world outside Barnstaple where all the things that really mattered happened.

"You will not always live in Barnstaple,

Eleanor," he used to tell her. "When you are grown up I shall take you away from here to London. London is the place where people do things instead of gaping at them. You are a clever girl. People will understand that in London, though they don't understand it here. In London—one never knows,—you may even come to be a distinguished woman."

So, in the midst of these Barnstaple people, with their proprieties, their prejudices, their limitations, Eleanor grew up with a great longing for the wider world that was to be so different—the world of which her father's talk showed her such intoxicating glimpses.

Meanwhile her father had her perfect confidence. She had no other confidant, but to her father she told everything. She told him even of her love affairs. For Eleanor had several love affairs in Barnstaple, though she herself had never been in love with any of her suitors.

It was inevitable because she was so pretty. The girls of Barnstaple might not like her. They considered her conceited because she sometimes talked above their heads, and was not always very keenly interested in the conversation which interested them. But the young men took broader views and found her charming, and when they met her at

river-picnics would often propose marriage to her on the way home along the towing-path.

Three several times she received a proposal of marriage and each time she came and told her father all about it. Now, as she sat musing in her little morning room, the memory of each proposal came back to her.

"What a different life it would have been, if I had married one of them," she murmured; and then she let her mind stray, conjuring up the details, and particularly recalling the old man's candid comments upon each proposal.

The first proposal of all, she remembered, was from a certain Mr. Richard Wantage—an articled clerk to a much respected firm of Barnstaple solicitors.

Mr. Wantage was not at all an eligible young man. He was a young man of dissipated habits, as they understand dissipation in the provinces. He neglected his duties in order to play billiards in the day-time. In the evening he frequented the bar of the Red Lion and drank whiskey and water in quantities astonishing in one so young. On Sundays, he was to be seen at the church door smoking a cigar in the face of the congregation issuing from morning prayer. He also played cards for money after midnight, and seemed to be going to the Devil with singular rapidity.

His redeeming merit was that, when he fell in love with Eleanor, he became keenly conscious of his shortcomings, and admitted them with candour, entreating Eleanor to help him to reform. It seemed to him that a beautiful woman could put her beauty to no nobler purpose than the reformation of a rake.

"I know I'm an awfully bad lot, Miss Daunt," he said, "but I'm sure I could turn over a new leaf if you would marry me."

But Eleanor excused herself from taking part in the experiment and afterwards she told her father what had passed between them. She could still hear the indignant snort of scorn which prefaced his reply

"I wish," he said, "that Mr. Richard Wantage had put that point to me. I should have been glad to ask him whether he seriously supposed that my daughter had no better use to put her life to than the reclamation of a dissolute attorney. And I should have liked to tell him further that, if he could not see his way to reclaiming himself by other means, he had better continue to be dissolute."

That was the first proposal. The second was from a young man of a very different sort—from a Mr. Alfred Fletcher who was a clerk in the Barn-

staple branch of the National and Provincial Bank.

This Mr. Fletcher was, in every respect a more eligible young man than Mr. Wantage. His habits were exemplary, and scandal could say nothing to the disadvantage of his character. At the time when he proposed to Eleanor moreover, he was more eligible than ever, having just been promoted to be the manager of the Northmolton branch. He would have made an excellent husband to any woman who liked men of the dull and plodding sort, and whose ideal was solid worth.

It took him some time to grasp the fact that he was unacceptable to Eleanor and he continued to urge his suit with patient insistence even after his rejection.

" He seemed very much upset about it," Eleanor told her father. " He asked me if I could n't try to love him. He said that he was sure that I could learn to love him if I tried."

For there are some men, it seems, who hold that love—and more especially a woman's love—is a thing like faith to be determined by the human will, and that any woman can learn to love them if she tries.

There was a twinkle—Eleanor could still see that twinkle—in the Professor's eye as, with unfal-

tering logic, he put his finger on the weak point in the young man's position.

"He asked you to try to love him?" he repeated. "And did he mention any particular reason why you should?"

Eleanor could not recollect that Mr. Fletcher had mentioned any particular reason why she should try to love him.

"Do you mean to try, Eleanor?" the old man continued.

She shook her head; and her father sealed the decision with his approval.

"No," he said, "it does not seem to me that there is anything in the end which could be held to justify the means."

So Mr. Alfred Fletcher was dismissed without encouragement, and a third suitor succeeded to his place.

This third suitor was the curate—the Reverend Paul Devine. Even the memory of the Professor's admonition that he would do well to preach less and to read more had not prevented the Reverend Paul Devine from falling in love with the Professor's daughter.

His wooing differed from the wooing of the other suitors. He was too modest to pretend that he had any personal claim to the favour of a woman's

love, basing his suit rather on the fact that he was a minister of the Word, a duly accredited successor of the apostles.

It was not that he was less in love with Eleanor than the others. On the contrary his was a more enduring, because it was a more spiritual—even a more intelligent affection. But he was very young, and very High Church, and knew very little of women and of the world, and had just left the Theological College of Cuddesdon with very pure ideals. Therefore he urged Eleanor to marry him almost as a duty—her duty to God as well as to her neighbour. Though he was, as he modestly expressed it, the least of all the apostles, yet union with him would mean for her increased opportunities of usefulness, and a larger means of grace.

But there was a flaw in the argument which Dr. Daunt pitilessly exposed, when Eleanor came to him as usual, and told him what Mr. Devine had said.

"If an apostle, then why the least of the apostles?" he asked in the triumphant and aggressive tones of one who tears up a fallacy by the roots.

And Eleanor did not try to answer him being no more in love with the Reverend Paul Devine than with any of her other suitors.

CHAPTER III.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

HER husband came late into Eleanor's reverie, as he had come late into her life. It was true that they had always known each other—always liked each other—but it was only towards the end that he became important to her. Before that, the only person who was really important to her was her father. But now her memory revived in their due turn the scenes in the old life in which Walter played a part.

He was the only son of the Vicar of the parish, and between the Vicar and the Professor there had been an intimacy that had seemed scandalous to many of the parishioners. It did not appear to them that the Professor was a good companion for the Vicar, and they said so, some of them even supporting the proposition from the Scriptures.

There was Mrs. Byrant, for instance, who had a great reputation for common sense, and whose wisdom was listened to with deference at many five-o'clock teas.

"Evil communications corrupt good manners; we have the best authority for that," she said; and it occurred to no one to suggest to her that it might also be true that good communications were profitable to evil manners, and that, if the Professor was not a good companion for the Vicar, at least the Vicar was a good companion for the Professor, and might even then be engaged in the endeavour to persuade the Professor to go to church and listen to his sermon.

But, in truth, it was without any idea of converting him, that Mr. Temple sought the society of Dr. Daunt. They never talked theology. The Professor knew that it was bad form to talk theology with clergymen; and the Vicar had learnt that it was indiscreet to talk theology with professors. Consequently they never quarrelled; and Mr. Temple found Mr. Daunt a better companion, in spite of his reputation for ungodliness, than any of the church-wardens and the sidesmen. Having been a fellow of his college in his time, he had even more respect for intellect than he had for piety, and because Dr. Daunt was intellectual he forgave him for being heterodox—forgave him even for having recommended his curate to "read more."

So it came about that when Walter Temple and

Eleanor Daunt were children they saw a great deal of each other, had tea together in their parents' houses, played together in the Vicarage garden, made hay together in Farmer Spurway's meadows, and went blackberrying together in the lanes.

It was on one of those blackberrying expeditions, Eleanor remembered, that Walter had first asked her to marry him. Or rather—to be strictly accurate—he had not asked her, but, assuming that she would be glad to marry him, had kindly promised that she should.

Lying back in the cushioned divan in the little studio at Kensington, she saw the scene re-enact itself before her eyes.

Walter was twelve years old and she was eight. They were coming down the little lane that leads from Pilton Hill to Raleigh. Walter was carrying the basket, and both their hands were blue with blackberry juice. They had walked for a long while without speaking, as children often will. Then Walter broke the silence, saying without preface:

"Eleanor, when I grow up, I'm going to be a famous painter."

She did not doubt it. It had been understood between them ever since he began to draw. Long

before any one else suspected it, he and she knew that he was going to be a famous painter when he grew up.

"It's a great thing, Eleanor, to be a famous painter."

She knew that also. Mrs. Bryant's theory that a painter was a drawing-master and that a drawing-master was a person who could not get tickets for the Yeomanry Ball, had never presented itself to her.

Walter went on:

"And when I'm a famous painter I shall come back to Barnstaple and marry you. You won't be grown up nearly as soon as I shall, but I shan't mind waiting for you. And—" this as a sort of after thought—"I don't think we'll live in Barnstaple."

For Walter Temple was one of the rare boys who are born at Barnstaple with the spirit of enterprise and adventure, and must needs go away to seek their fortune among strangers. Already, when he was thirteen, he heard a voice in his ears, calling him to the wider world—the world where, as the Professor said, people did things instead of gaping at them. As soon as he was old enough he went to it.

First of all he went to Blundell's School at

Tiverton, where all the Barnstaple boys were sent, and afterwards, as he would have none of the learned professions, but insisted that he would be a painter, he was sent to study art in London, and having studied it, remained to practise it with promising success. But Eleanor, meanwhile remained at Barnstaple, living with her father, and refused the offers of marriage that were made to her by Mr. Richard Wantage, and Mr. Alfred Fletcher, and the Reverend Paul Devine.

She refused them however, without any thought of Walter. She was never, in any proper sense, engaged to Walter. A boy and girl engagement such as theirs was, did not count. It does not need even to be formally broken off. If it was not formally renewed, then it would lapse gradually, of its own accord.

Thus, when Eleanor and Walter were little children it was quite understood between them that they were to be married when they grew up, and they talked a great deal about it, building many castles in the air. But afterwards, though they were always glad to see each other, when he came to Barnstaple, they talked of other things instead.

Seeing them so frequently together, people naturally talked.

"If Eleanor Daunt is n't engaged to Walter Temple she ought to be," Mrs. Bryant said. "I consider her behaviour most improper and indiscreet, and I wonder her father does n't interfere. As the poor child has got no mother, I think it would be only a kindness to speak to him about it."

But Eleanor and Walter were not engaged, and had no wish to be engaged. They were good friends, good companions—that was all. They could talk to each other of things they could not talk about to other people. She understood his ambitions; he divined her possibilities. So they liked each other very much indeed. But there was no romance; and though they did not know it, there were always places in the inner life of each to which the other might not penetrate. Neither life was of real importance to the other.

Then, just at the beginning of Eleanor's twentieth year, her father died suddenly of heart disease.

That was the saddest of all the memories that she recalled. The scared face of the maid-servant, who came suddenly into her room, the effort to break the news to her gently, her sudden burst of anguish when the terrible truth was blurted out, the long days of grief and tears and loneliness, the visits of friends whose sympathy was so wel-

come and yet so unavailing—all these things came vividly back to her across the years, and she still cried at the recollection of them.

Then, hard upon the first blow, there came a second, her father had left no provision for her. He had insured his life, but the Company was in liquidation. There was just a little ready money for immediate needs, and when that was spent, Eleanor would have to earn her living.

With her grief still fresh upon her, she had to face the situation.

She found a friend and an adviser, where she had least looked for one, in Mrs. Bryant.

For Mrs. Bryant had a talent for the management of other people's business which was very useful in a crisis. In the hours of their prosperity she knew what they ought to do, and if they did not do it, criticised them freely; but, at the times of their distress, she also knew what they ought to do, and would take pains to put them in the way of doing it. Many people who could never quite bring themselves to like Mrs. Bryant, because her manner was unsympathetic and her sense of duty awe-inspiring, had to confess themselves indebted to her.

So Mrs. Bryant overlooked the fact that Eleanor's conduct had been "improper and indiscreet,"

but came to her with an imposing rustle of costly silks to offer counsel and assistance.

"I suppose, my dear," she said, after more or less formal expressions of condolence, "I suppose you are beginning to look out for a situation."

For that is what it resolves itself into in the provinces. In London there are many ways in which a destitute girl if she is clever enough, may get her living. She may write for the newspapers, or she may draw, or she may paint. She may be a clerk in an insurance office, or in the General Post Office. She may design wall-papers or decorate rooms. She may even go on the stage to be an actress. But in the provinces there is one way only. She must become a dependant in another person's house. In short, she must seek a situation.

Eleanor replied to Mrs. Bryant that she supposed it would be necessary for her to look out for a situation; and Mrs. Bryant made a practical suggestion.

"Well, it so happens, my dear," she said, "that Mrs. Oldfield of Frenmington is just now in need of a companion."

"A companion?"

"Yes, my dear. She 's been rather deaf for a long time, and now she 's getting blind and she wants some one to read the Bible to her."

A look passed over Eleanor's face that Mrs. Bryant could not understand. She fancied—though she was not quite sure—that it was meant to express pity for poor Mrs. Oldfield's infirmities.

"It is very sad for her, is n't it?" she added.

But it was not Mrs. Oldfield, but herself, that Eleanor was pitying. Perhaps her case was harder, because she was younger and therefore more capable of suffering.

She was nineteen—a clever girl who had always been encouraged to think herself cleverer than she actually was: her mind was just beginning to be conscious of its dawning possibilities; she longed for some larger life, some kindlier environment in which the chance might be given her to expand. Instead, she was offered the chance of burying herself in a country village and reading the Bible to a deaf woman.

"And," she reflected, with one of those silly little laughs that often come to people in their most mournful moments, "the Bible is n't even my favourite book."

She could n't tell these thoughts to Mrs. Bryant, and Mrs. Bryant was not the woman to divine them. Yet she must have guessed a something of them, for she hastened to offer an alternative.

"Or perhaps, my dear," she said "you might

like teaching better. Well, there 's a vacancy just now for a junior governess in Miss Maxwell's school at Tristow. I daresay she 'll be willing to take you on my recommendation, and I 'll write to her about it this very night."

She did not even ask Eleanor whether she approved of the arrangement ; she made the arrangement for her, assuming that it would be approved because she was sure that it was the best that could be made. But she wrote to Miss Maxwell, as she had said she would, and came again a few days afterwards to tell Eleanor that everything was settled ; that her salary would be twenty pounds a year ; and that her duties would begin at the end of the following month. It was the way in which Mrs. Bryant habitually did things.

So Eleanor went for a while to Tristow to be a a teacher in Miss Maxwell's Establishment for Young Ladies, and the memory of the time was frightful to her still.

Not that she had really anything to complain of ; the other governesses did not complain. Miss Maxwell was very considerate and kind, though prim and old-fashioned in her ways. The work was only moderately hard, and there was plenty of good plain food provided. Eleanor's one griev-

ance was that, just as she was longing for a rich and full life where her faculties might grow, she was tied down to a dull and narrow life where her faculties were starved. But that was a torture for which neither kindness nor good plain food could make amends.

"It was," she once told her husband afterwards, "like living in a convent, where all the nuns have been carried off by force, and made to take the veil against their will."

Only the things she missed were not the dances, the picnics, and the gaiety, the lack of which causes some young governesses to cry at night. At least she was not conscious of missing these things, though, no doubt, as she was only nineteen, their presence would in a measure have consoled her. The thing that troubled her was the ring-fence that seemed to be built round her life, shutting out from her all the interests that she had been taught to value, all the things that her father had told her "really mattered."

As for the details of her life, these are best given in an abstract from a letter which she wrote about that time to Mrs. Temple.

"The day begins," she wrote, "when the bell rings for us to get up at seven, and at a quarter to eight we have to be down to morning prayers.

Not being used to early rising, I began badly by being late for prayers. Miss Maxwell was very kind about it. She said that morning prayers were a great privilege, and that she hoped it would not occur again. I reflected—though I did not like to say so—that one is not in a condition to value great privileges properly when one is sleepy, and I am sorry to say that it has occurred again. Miss Maxwell was not quite so nice about it this time, but still she was nicer than I expected.

"After prayers we have breakfast, and after breakfast we have morning school till twelve. I teach geography and history, and arithmetic and grammar. The children are very stupid, and not nearly so well behaved with me as they are with Miss Maxwell.

"After school we go for a walk. The children march two and two, and we governesses follow behind to see that they behave properly. We get home just in time for dinner, and after dinner there is more school, and another walk. In the evening we take it in turns to sit with the girls in the school-room, while they prepare their lessons for the next day. When they have gone to bed, we have supper with Miss Maxwell in the dining-room, and talk over the events of the day—how the girls are getting on with their lessons, and what

are their faults of character and temper, and which of them require specially careful management.

"That is my life! Nothing else ever happens except on Sundays when we go to church in the morning and evening, and hear the girls say the catechism and the collect in the afternoon."

Truly a very simple and a very honourable life. Such women—such women as Miss Maxwell for example—are able to find in such a life full satisfaction for their souls. They do not ask to have touch of the bustle and movement of the world, or to have palpitating emotions of their own. It is enough for them to live in the lives of others—to sympathise with one child in her struggles with the irregular verbs, to cure another of the habit of putting her elbows on the table, to check the vanity of a third, to tell a fourth not to be a "tom-boy." Trivialities of that sort are not trivial to them, but actually fill their lives, so that they have no sense of any void. It is well for the rising generation that there are such women in the world.

Perhaps most women, if they try long enough, can grow to be like that in time. But for a young woman it is hard. How shall a young woman be satisfied to be a mere appendage to the lives of others? She wants to live her own life—to think, to feel, to enjoy, and even to suffer, on her own

account. Therefore she struggles hard, and looks back eagerly and often, before she resigns herself to a life in which the one emotion is to miss the emotions that she feels she ought so have. Looking in the face of any young governess who expects that she will always be a governess, one sees the traces of the struggle marked there. And if it so happens that one finds her smiling cheerfully, then all that is needed is to wait and watch her features in repose.

So Eleanor, like the rest—only more than the rest—struggled, and looked backwards, and went about her duties under the burden of a dumb despair.

It was as though a curtain, heavy, black, impenetrable, hung down between her and everything that might make life desirable. Exactly what lay on the yonder side of the curtain she did not know as yet. Yet she remembered the glimpses of it that her father's talk had shown her and she knew that somewhere there was a world where people thought and acted, where the "things that really mattered happened," where trifles were recognised as trifles, where a woman as well as a man might live out her own life, and not run like a marble in a groove.

All that was beyond the curtain. Though she

had never seen it, she was sure of it and longed for it. But, on her side of the curtain, life was wholly made up of trifles ; of morning prayers, and morning school, and the morning walk ; of history and geography, and arithmetic, and grammar, and the collect, and the catechism ; of petty punishments for petty faults. This everyday, and after everyday was over the talk with Miss Maxwell about the day's events—about the pupils' progress in their lessons, their deportment, and their character.

So Eleanor despaired, thinking that she would never be allowed to pass the curtain ; and Miss Maxwell like the good, kind-hearted, simple soul she was, wondered why Eleanor seemed so discontented.

But the curtain was to be lifted, notwithstanding, and the happiest day in Eleanor's life was to be the day when she married the man who only liked her, and whom she only liked.

Certainly there was not even what one could reasonably call an understanding. Yet people had talked as though there were this understanding, and Mrs. Temple had set her mind upon the marriage, and it was not hard for her to persuade Walter that some such understanding had existed.

She wrote to him, hinting at it darkly, and drawing a sad picture of Eleanor's unhappiness.

That was the first step. The second was to bring Walter down to Barnstaple to be discreetly talked to.

He came and listened to what his mother had to say. She showed him the letters that Eleanor had written her; and he, reading them with the artist's intuition saw even more than she did between the lines, and plumbed the depths of the melancholy which they disclosed. He knew her well enough to understand how she would suffer, imprisoned apart from all the real life of the world.

Then his mother told him with gentle tact, what she had thought, and hoped, reminding him of the things that he had said to raise her hopes, exaggerating, and perhaps sometimes unconsciously inventing, until at last it began to seem to him that his honour was involved. And yet he hesitated.

"But there is no one else, Walter?" Mrs. Temple dared at last to ask him. "You would have told me if you had been in love with any one else?"

He laughed lightly as he denied it. Flirtations? Yes, he must confess to that. Perhaps one flirtation that had threatened to be sentimental! But no entanglement—nothing that need hinder the freedom of his choice, or the happiness of any

marriage he might make. Therefore he could answer :

" No, mother, there is no one else. What makes you ask me ? "

Then Mrs. Temple sat down and wrote a letter inviting Eleanor to visit her ; and Eleanor came to spend her summer holidays at the Vicarage.

She looked very pretty in her simple black dress trimmed with crape. The little black ribbon that she wore in the evenings looked wonderfully well upon her auburn hair. Her eyes—her beautiful violet eyes—looked very pleading and pathetical. By degrees, too, the cheerful influences brightened her. Life began to recover its interest for her, and she could smile. She looked prettier than ever when her features lighted up.

Walter looked at her, and felt his admiration growing. He compared her with some of the other women whom he knew in London—in particular with the other girls whom he had flirted with. There was no doubt of it. Eleanor had the advantage over them at every point. She was more beautiful ; she was more intelligent ; she was more refined. She could talk better of the things that formed his highest interests. It would give him more pride to introduce her to his friends. Moreover, he was very, very sorry for her.

He would have preferred to wait—to make sure whether his pity and his admiration were really the same thing as love. But he agreed with himself that this could not be done.

"Let her go back to that prison? She won't be looking so pretty after six months more of it. Her charm, too, will begin to disappear. The life will wear her down, and she'll get stiff and staid and prim, just as all governesses do—only fit to marry a parson or a school-master; and I shall always have a sort of feeling that it's all my fault."

He felt, therefore, that he must speak at once or not at all; and so the day came when Walter Temple asked Eleanor Daunt to marry him.

They were in the Vicarage garden, in the summer-house, where they used to have tea when they were children; and, for the greater part of the afternoon, they had been talking about themselves. That is to say, Walter had talked of the things that he had done and meant to do, and Eleanor had talked of the things that she would like to do but never could, now that she was condemned to spend her time in hearing little girls their lessons, and telling them not to bite their nails. They had also had a general conversation about art and letters, and Eleanor had asked intelligent questions about impressionism.

It was a very interesting conversation, and Walter contrasted it with conversations he had had with other girls. Decidedly it was on a higher plane, and more satisfying to his intellectual nature. It is true that if it had suddenly been interrupted, never to be resumed, he would not have regretted it much more than one regrets the companion who told such amazing anecdotes at dinner, or the partner at the ball who was the best dancer in the room. But he hardly realised this, and found it very charming while it lasted. Moreover his mother's words had had their weight with him.

So he began :

"Do you remember, Eleanor, how, when we were little, we always meant to marry each other when we grew up ?"

She smiled, her eyes drooping downwards.

"That was a very long time ago, Walter," she answered.

"Yes, Eleanor. It was a long time ago, and we are not little any more. But now that we have grown up, and I have begun to make my way, I have come back to keep my promise. Will you keep yours, Eleanor ? Will you marry me ?"

Her eyes still drooped, and many thoughts were whirling through her brain.

There was no false pretence of passion in his

tones to cheat her with any false belief. Evidently he admired her: evidently he liked her very much, as she liked him. But that was all. There was no passion, no romance; she was twenty—an age at which life seems to be incomplete without romance. Still might not the romance grow later, after marriage, as it sometimes did in books? And, even if it did not, was it not romance enough to be lifted suddenly out of this wearisome life of monotonies and trifles, and launched into that larger life of which she dreamed so much and knew so little?

"You will marry me, Eleanor?" Walter repeated putting out his hand and taking hers, gently and caressingly, but more in the manner of an elder brother than of a lover.

"Yes, Walter," she said softly; and then he drew her near to him and kissed her, and she felt that he was very good to her.

So the heart of Mrs. Temple was rejoiced, and Eleanor and Walter were almost persuaded that they were in love through hearing it said so often by the mouths of many independent witnesses.

For the marriage was an event in Barnstaple—when people are connected with the clergy in such a place every thing that happens to them is an

event—and all classes of the population, low as well as high, discussed the match and sealed it with their enthusiastic approbation.

"Parson be powerful pleased, he be, and no wonder neither," said the lower orders. "Miss Eleanor bea n't the sort that needs to go beggin' for husbands. Accordin' to what I hear tell there 's more than one she said 'No' to afore she said 'Yes' to Master Walter."

Thus half the chorus, and the other half responded:

"Aye, and Master Walter he be a fine young gentleman too, so nice-spoken and so clever as you 'd never think. Paints so as nobody 'd believe 'e did it by 'isself if they had n't seen 'im at it. Painted one of Farmer Spurway's pigs, 'e did, and sent it up to a great show, up to London. They do say Master Walter got more money for picture than ever Farmer Spurway got for pig."

Such were the comments of their humbler neighbours. As for educated opinion Mrs. Bryant, as usual, summed it up.

"Upon the whole," she said, "I consider it a very suitable arrangement. I don't say that Walter Temple might n't have looked higher, and everybody knows that Eleanor Daunt has n't had a penny to bless herself with since her poor father

died, hardly leaving enough money to pay for his own coffin, to say nothing of crape bands for the mourners. But I should be sorry to see the poor child have to go out as a governess, as she did at Miss Maxwell's school at Tristow, where she disgraced my recommendation by coming down late for morning prayers, and, as they say they 've been engaged to each other ever since they were children though they never told anybody about it. I hope and believe she 'll make him a good wife in spite of her bad training, and I 'm sending them a dozen electro-plated fish knives and forks with my love and best wishes for their happiness."

And that is how it came about that Eleanor drove away from the old life to the new, pursued by rice, and slippers, and a tumult of congratulations.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW LIFE.

THE new life!

At last it had begun, and Eleanor rejoiced in it as a schoolboy rejoices in his holidays, as an undergraduate rejoices in his emancipation.

She was in London—the London that she had dreamed of and longed for, and it seemed to her that, for the first time in her life, she really had begun to live. For, though there are many Londons, most of them conventional and commonplace enough, in the London in which Eleanor found herself people thought for themselves, and spoke their opinions without fear of social consequences, and were not the least afraid of differing from their neighbours.

Her London was not then the London of the suburbs. That doubtless would have disappointed her. For the suburbs have most of the prejudices and conventions of the provinces, though they ex-

press them in a more distinguished tone of voice. They gossip ; they spend long hours in discussing whether a new-comer is a proper person to be called upon ; they go to church on Sunday for fear of forfeiting each other's good opinion ; and they look askance at women who aspire to be individuals instead of items. So Eleanor soon learnt to take a lofty tone towards the suburbs—saying that they differed from the provinces only in despising them, and in getting the London papers a few hours earlier.

The capital of Eleanor's London was Kensington, and the only suburb which she allowed herself to recognise was Bedford Park. But, as there are many Londons, so there are many Kensingtons, and she knew little of the rich Kensington, where are found the big houses, the pompous dinner-parties, and the double-barrelled names. Hers was that cheaper Kensington which radiates from the High Street—the Kensington where rising artists have their studios, and rising men of letters live in flats. On the West, this Kensington is bounded by Hammersmith, and on the East by St. Mary Abbot's Church. Chelsea is to a certain extent affiliated to it, and so is Campden Hill, but it knows Bayswater only by repute.

A flavour of Bohemianism pervades this region,

though one may live there for years without discovering it, because the Bohemianism is surrounded by so much irrelevant and extraneous matter. Yet, if one looks for it, one ends by finding it, and, finding it, perceives that it differs very widely from the Bohemianism of Fleet Street and the Strand. The Bohemian of Fleet Street, one has noticed, does not wash or shave, but smells of whiskey and spends most of his leisure in the public-houses, wondering what can be the reason why he does not succeed in life. But the Bohemians of Kensington live cleanly and, for the most part, work hard. They dress well, though some of them effect little eccentricities in the way of hats and overcoats, and pay their rates and taxes like their neighbours. Some of them even keep early hours, though few of them ever go to church, fearing, perhaps, that they may thus acquire too stiff and stereotyped views of life.

The men mostly make their living by their brains. They write, they paint, they sculpt, they draw in black and white for the illustrated papers. Among the women are included novelists, journalists, though these are not particularly popular; pianists, concert-singers, and even a few actresses on whose reputation the breath of scandal has not blown. Not all of them know each other, of

course, for in Bohemia, as elsewhere, there are cliques and sub-divisions of cliques; but there are certain houses where most of them are apt to be met from time to time.

That then, was the set in which Eleanor found herself when Walter Temple took her away from Miss Maxwell's school at Tristow, and married her, and her first sensation was of astonishment to find so many women breathing the bracing air of independent life, cultivating and expanding their own temperaments without reference apparently to the temperaments of men, and cherishing quite other ambitions than that of being wives and mothers. She had thought of this often as a thing that might be done; her father's talk could hardly have failed to turn her thoughts that way; and yet, for all that, it was something of a revelation to fall upon a place where women actually did it. It was a feature in the new life that pleased her.

Her initiation took place at one of the Stornoways' evening parties.

"Who are the Stornoways? Are they celebrities?" she asked, when the card arrived announcing that Mrs. Stornoway would be at home from ten P.M. till one A.M. on the second and fourth Thursdays in October and November.

"Well, they 're celebrities to a certain extent,"

Walter answered, "but their chief line is to collect celebrities. At least that 's Stornoway's line. He has a theory that all the celebrities ought to know each other, so he collects them and introduces them. A most useful man, especially for beginners. You 'll find it very different from Barnstaple."

And it was different from Barnstaple—very, very different.

At the Barnstaple parties the guests used to sit round the sides of the room on straight-backed chairs, comporting themselves with pomp and ceremony. When they had all arrived, the hostess used to suggest with the air of one who had suddenly struck a new and happy thought, that they should have a little music. Then the Reverend Paul Devine used to sing, "I fear no foe," and Mr. Richard Wantage would sing—"I 've a penny paper flower in my coat, la-di-da," and the girls would play their pieces—"Le Jet d'Eau," and "The Maiden's Prayer," and "Home Sweet Home," with variations. Afterwards a round game would be proposed. Usually it would be Loo, though in some houses Pope Joan still lingered. It would be played very seriously, and elderly ladies would show temper when they lost more than eighteen pence. Finally, at a little after eleven, everybody would say good-night and go home to bed.

At Stornoway's, Eleanor discovered, things were managed in a very different way. There, nobody sat on high-backed chairs, because there were no high-backed chairs to sit on. But there were plenty of lounge-chairs and rocking-chairs, and sofas, and divans, and cosey corners, and solid piles of cushions strewn to serve as seats upon the floor. On the little fancy side-tables scattered about the room there were china trays with chocolate and *fondants* for the ladies, and Egyptian cigarettes for the men. For smoking was allowed there, and in the inner room, where the light was not so brilliant because the lamps had coloured glass, some of the ladies smoked, not timidly and awkwardly, as some of the Barnstaple girls had smoked with the connivance of their brothers, but naturally and boldly, as though smoking were the legitimate consolation of the artistic temperament.

There was no music, and the need for music was not felt. At Barnstaple the conversation always used to flag unless there were music to sustain it and to give the talkers confidence. But here the talk flowed freely without such artificial stimulus. Everyone had something to say, and there were far more talkers than listeners, so that the noise of tongues overflowed into the passages, and when the front door opened, escaped down

the staircase of the mansions. And, in the midst of the confusion there was Stornoway, moving indefatigably from group to group, telling the celebrities that they ought to know each other, and taking them over to be introduced.

Eleanor was overwhelmed that evening with introductions—introductions that, so to speak, overlapped each other, with the result that the curtain was dropped forcibly and prematurely on almost every conversation that she began. "It was," she said afterwards, "just like the children's game of General Post."

She was talking, for instance, to Mrs. Bolton Brown, a buxom, portly lady, the wife of a copious and celebrated writer of sentimental songs; and Mrs. Bolton Brown was describing to her the type of a man whom she admired.

"The type, my dear, that you see on a punt at Cookham, with brown arms, and a red neck, and a crimson sash round its waist; the type that does n't think but only feels. You see I have the misfortune to be married to a very clever man, and I'm rather clever myself—I do a little dramatic criticism, you know—sometimes there's so much intellect in the house that I get absolutely sick of it."

"I did n't think anybody could get tired of intellect," Eleanor was beginning, "I 'm sure——"

But she got no chance of arguing the question out. Stornoway arrived, bringing two men with him, and introduced one of them to Mrs. Bolton Brown and the other to Eleanor.

"Mr. Duncan Deane, one of our most rising young novelists, the author of *Stiff Tales From the Prairies*, which of course you 've read," he murmured; and for ten minutes Eleanor talked with Mr. Duncan Deane.

Mr. Duncan Deane was tall and clean-shaven, with long yellow hair that nearly hid his ears and collar, the chest of a Hercules, the biceps of a blacksmith, and the manner of a man who had a message for the world. In the absence of a larger audience, he soon began delivering his message to Eleanor.

"This literary life, Mrs. Temple," he said, "is n't a proper life for a man. It 's only fit for children."

Eleanor wondered what the books would be like if only children wrote them, but refrained from saying so for fear of seeming frivolous.

"The people who talk about literary work," Mr. Duncan Deane went on, "have never known what it means to work. I know what work is because I 've done some of it in my time, before I ever thought of this miserable trade. Do you think

I 'm proud of the little success my books have had in it? I don't care a snap of the fingers for it. What I 'm proud of is that I once worked with a pick and shovel, and helped to build the Norfolk and Western Railway."

His eyes flashed as he spoke. It was evident that he was not posing, but meant every word of what he said. Eleanor protested mildly:

"But a work of art, Mr. Deane! Don't you think that a work of art is worth more to the world than a railway? Art lifts people higher. A railway only helps them to move about on the level."

"Art, Mrs. Temple? Wherever one goes one always hears that talk about art. Did you ever stop to consider what art is? No? Then I will tell you. Art is a disease, Mrs. Temple. Neither more nor less than a disease. The healthy man——"

But Stornoway reappeared in the middle of the sentence, saying:

"Duncan Deane, I want you to come and be introduced to a charming woman in the next room. Mrs. Temple, allow me to introduce Mr. Pyne. Of course you 've seen Mr. Pyne's water-colours at the Rembrandt Head."

Mr. Pyne came, threading his way delicately through the living labyrinth—a fair-haired young

man, full of animal spirits, and delightfully unconscious of the fact, which was beyond dispute, that he was the most distinguished artist in the room.

He did not talk of art at all, but told Eleanor how he had just contributed to the general amusement by drawing a caricature of Marcus Brand, the *décadent* poet, on his own shirt-front. Then, encouraged by her evident interest, he lapsed into anecdotes, and described with as much *aplomb* as though it were an every day affair with him, how he had once broken open a coffee stall to steal a loaf of bread.

"I was awfully hard up, you know, in those days. Slept where I could, and had n't had anything to eat for ever so long. Then, about three o'clock in the morning, I came upon a coffee-stall on the Chelsea Embankment. I hung around for a bit, wondering whether any one would offer to treat me but no one did. Perhaps I looked too proud. So I waited till the coffee-stall was closed, and then caught sight of a bit of iron railing that was lying in the road, picked it up and smashed in the side of the coffee-stall with it. After all there was n't anything there except cups and saucers, and I heard the steps of a policeman coming up the road."

But what the policeman said to Mr. Pyne, and

what Mr. Pyne replied to the policeman, Eleanor was not allowed to hear. The time had come round for a fresh shuffle of the cards, and she was presented to Mrs. Belbrooke, the lady novelist.

"Awfully clever woman. Says the most sarcastic things. You ought to know her," Mr. Stornoway whispered.

And Mrs. Belbrooke proceeded forthwith to justify her reputation.

"Is n't Mr. Stornoway's energy wonderful," she said. "He introduces us all to each other with the rapidity of genius. If ever he goes to heaven, I know exactly what he' ll do. He'll tap Gabriel on the shoulder and ask him if he knows Raphael; and he 'll go on without waiting for an answer, 'Most interesting archangel, Raphael. Musical and all that sort of thing. Quite an archangel you ought to know. Come along and I 'll introduce you!'"

Eleanor laughed, and said that it was very useful to be introduced to people when one came from the country and did n't know them.

"Of course it is—awfully useful. And so you come from the country, do you? You 'll like London better. God made the country, and woman made the town because the country was too slow for her. Don't you agree with me?"

"Things don't happen in the country," Eleanor quoted from her father's wisdom.

"No, things don't happen in the country, and what 's more to the point we women are n't allowed to count for anything in the country. In the country, I understand, the whole duty of woman is to give orders to the cook."

"And to make jam," Eleanor added out of the greater fullness of her knowledge.

"Ah! well, here, when we want jam we buy it. That leaves us more time for living our own lives. Living your own life, you know, is the latest rage in London, and the people who are n't in the movement chaff us about it terribly. There 's my friend Captain Armitage, for instance. He was good enough to take a message for me, the other day to the *Pall Mall Gazette* office, and he met a lady journalist on the stairs, and he will have it that she made eyes at him as they passed. Anyhow, his comment, when he told me the story was, 'that 's what they call living their own lives, doncher know, Mrs. Belbrooke.'"

All this sounded very frivolous, but Eleanor was not displeased by it, perceiving that the frivolity was only superficial. She felt that she could like Mrs. Belbrooke; and when Mrs. Belbrooke continued, she was comparatively serious.

"Of course that is n't what living your own life really means," she said. "It means being a personality instead of a *femme de ménage.* It means practising an art—we all call ourselves artists here—and cultivating the temperament that art requires. It means regarding your husband, if you live with him, as a rival potentate instead of as a lord and master. Those are the inward spiritual graces, and the outward visible sign is to belong to the Pioneer Club."

"What is the Pioneer Club?" Eleanor naturally wished to know.

"You don't know the Pioneer Club? But of course you don't, though we do manage to get into the papers pretty often. Well, I really hardly know what to tell you about it except that it 's the Club we women all join when we want to begin living our own lives. Anyhow, I have n't time to tell you more about it now, as I must n't keep the carriage waiting any longer. But won't you come to see me some day? I 'm always at home and glad to see people on Sunday afternoons, and if you 'll come we can have a long talk together. Now I must say good-night."

She shook hands and rose to go, and Eleanor looked round and noticed that the rooms were emptying. In the dim light of the inner room,

where the lamps had coloured glasses, some half-dozen couples were conversing in subdued but earnest tones, and a shout of laughter came from the refreshment buffet out of sight. But it was late and time to go. So Eleanor signalled to her husband who was listening wearily to Mr. Duncan Deane's reiterated message to the world about the worthlessness of art, and the servant whistled down the tube for a hansom while she went to fetch her wraps.

"You were amused, Eleanor?" Walter asked, as they rode home together.

"I was more than amused," she answered, "I was interested."

"It 's a little different from Barnstaple, is n't it?"

"Yes, very different."

"And better?"

"Much better. It is so nice to find oneself in a place where women count for something, and no one thinks them wrong for living their own lives. Don't you think so, Walter?"

"I daresay," he answered, smiling to see how quickly she had learnt the catchwords, and taking them no more seriously from her than from another.

And that was Eleanor's initiation.

CHAPTER V.

THE PIONEER CLUB.

THE Pioneer Club—the club that the modern women joined "when they wanted to begin living their own lives!"

Eleanor was very curious to know more about this Club, and it was not long before she called on Mrs. Belbrooke to gratify her curiosity.

It was at one of Mrs. Belbrooke's Sunday "At Homes," but late in the afternoon, after most of her visitors had left, and there remained, besides Eleanor, only Captain Armitage who was so little in the movement that he laughed at the modern women for living their own lives, and Lily Marston who was still too young to have made up her mind whether it was a good thing to live one's own life or not, but was inclined to defer to Captain Armitage's opinion in the matter.

Before this small audience Mrs. Belbrooke proceeded to explain the Pioneer Club with her usual mixture of earnestness and mockery.

"The Pioneer Club, Mrs. Temple," she said, "is a Society of gentlewomen which exists for the purpose of giving a collective support to a bundle of incongruous opinions of which all its members individually disapprove."

The audience qualified the definition.

"All except Mrs. Brereton," said Captain Armitage with emphasis.

"Yes, all except my aunt," echoed Lily Marston.

Mrs. Belbrooke accepted the correction.

"With that exception naturally," she said. "A principle is not a principle at all unless you can find somebody to stick up for it."

Eleanor sought further information.

"But what principles?" she asked, "You see I'm so lately from the country that I need to have everything explained to me."

She might have added, though she did not, that being from the country, she was also at a loss to understand how anyone could be at once serious and frivolous as Mrs. Belbrooke was. For, in the country, though some people were serious and other people were frivolous, it was beyond the power of anyone to be serious and frivolous simultaneously.

But Mrs. Belbrooke continued in the same light strain, with the same half-suggestion of earnestness behind it.

"What principles?" she repeated. "Well I'm not sure that I'm particularly clear about that, myself. You see one seldom is particularly clear about the principles of which one disapproves. Surely you must have noticed that! It is one of the most interesting traits in human nature."

Remembering certain of the principles of which Mrs. Bryant and Miss Maxwell had disapproved, Eleanor answered that she had observed something of the sort at Barnstaple.

"Of course you have," Mrs. Belbrooke said, "and you'll find that it's much the same in London. The only difference is that in London a certain number of us are candid, and own up. Still I will make an effort, and try not to mystify you too much. Our principles then—the principles of which we individually disapprove—are advanced principles, and are chiefly connected with the sowing of wild oats. Is n't that the case, Captain Armitage?"

Captain Armitge looked uncomfortable, as a man to whom wild oats were not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality, and who wondered apprehensively what might be coming next.

This time, however, there was no occasion for alarm. Mrs. Belbrooke went on, without waiting for an answer to her question:

"You need n't look so frightened. I 'm not going to say anything dreadful. I only want to give Mrs. Temple fair warning that, if she goes to the Pioneer Club, she must be prepared to meet theories about wild oats. She will meet Mrs. Brereton's theory, which is shocking enough, that you men ought not to be allowed to sow your wild oats; she will meet Mrs. Morecomb's theory, which is more shocking still, that we women ought to be allowed to sow ours. We don't trouble our heads much about either theory as a general rule, but we keep both theories on the premises, especially Mrs. Brereton's."

Captain Armitage remarked with brutal candour that, in his opinion, the attics and the cellars were the parts of the premises where such theories might most advantageously be kept by women; but Mrs. Belbrooke would not be angry with him.

"That 's where we do keep them most of the time," she said. "Only about once a week Mrs. Brereton brings her theory into the reading-room, and writes letters to the papers about it."

"For that 's another of your characteristics," she added. "Individually we don't care two pins about publicity; but collectively we are n't happy unless we get into the papers once a week."

Then she went on to recommend the Club from

more practical points of view. It was such a comfort to have a place where one could see all the newspapers—women were so often expected to be satisfied with an occasional copy of the *Queen*, and a glimpse at the *Daily Telegraph* before their husbands carried it off to read, in the train, on their way to the city. Again, if one had a husband and lived with him, it was a relief sometimes to be able to go off somewhere where he could n't follow one without an invitation. Above all, it was charming to meet so many interesting people—so many people who were in the movement.

"And in the papers," Captain Armitage interjected.

"Naturally, I suppose it is because we are interesting that the journalists put us in the papers. And, as we are so interesting, I am sure Mrs. Temple would like to join us."

Eleanor said that she would ask her husband what he thought about it.

"They 'll pill you to a certainty if you do that, Mrs. Temple," said Captain Armitage.

But Eleanor laughed and said that she would take the risk. She had not thoroughly mastered the art of living her own life as yet; and certain old instincts and conventions still adhered to her.

So she laid the proposal before Walter, and found him amiable about it beyond her expectations.

"It 's a dull enough place in all conscience," he said, "but by all means join it if you like."

Not taking the Pioneer Club seriously himself he had no idea that Eleanor would take it seriously either, and argued that, so long as it was not taken seriously, it did no harm. Moreover, he wished to be reasonable and would not curtail her liberties, feeling that having married a clever woman, he must not presume to treat her like a child. She had a dignity and an apparent self-reliance which forbade it. He must take facts as he found them, even if he wished that they were different.

Therefore he acquiesced.

"No doubt it is better for both of us," he said, "that you should have your interests as I have mine"; and so Eleanor joined the Pioneer Club and entered upon the second stage of her initiation.

In their way, her experiences there were as much of a revelation to her as her first evening at the Stornoways' flat had been. At the Stornoways' after all, it was only the lighter aspects of the new life that had been presented to her, and she had only seen the modern woman at the hours when she unbent. Here she got a more serious view of things, and was introduced to the modern

woman in her more impressive moods, when, freed from the disturbing presence of another sex, they were able to take themselves absolutely seriously.

The difference, in short, between Stornoway's and the Pioneer Club was put pretty accurately by Mrs. Belbrooke.

"At Stornoway's," she said, "we advanced women only let off steam, but at the Pioneer Club we generate the steam."

There were, indeed, things connected with the Pioneer Club with which Eleanor was not entirely pleased—things that she had to get used to before they ceased to shock her. Some of the members, for example, dressed badly, and Eleanor had too much of the artistic faculty to admit that it was proper for a woman to live her own life in an unbecoming gown. She would not even allow the excuse that by this, as by buying jam instead of making it, a woman gained more time for living her own life; and she remained of that opinion even after she had come to count many of the badly dressed women among her friends.

She was also a little shocked when she discovered the existence of a smoking-room. The idea of a smoking-room seemed to her not only unwomanly but frivolous. Like so many of the best of women

she could never be quite made to understand that smoking was a serious occupation and very possibly the smoking which she witnessed at the Pioneer Club went some way to justify her scepticism.

But Mrs. Belbrooke made excuses for the smoking-room. It might almost be said, indeed, that Mrs. Belbrooke explained the smoking-room away.

"It serves as a sort of play room for frivolous and disorderly members," she said. "When they want to take their emancipation noisily they go up there, and so the rest of the Club is quiet. Of course Captain Armitage declares that when we want to make a noise we go into the Silence Room. But that is a calumny which has not even originality to excuse it. The truth is that only serious conversation is allowed in the Silence Room ; frivolous conversation is relegated to the Smoking-Room."

There were the drawbacks of the Club ; and they were only minor drawbacks. In the main Eleanor was charmed with it, charmed with its furniture and decorations, which were comfortable and tasteful, if not luxurious, charmed with the women whom she met there, charmed chiefly by the air of cheerful earnestness with which it was pervaded.

She went there often, and made many friends, though, in truth, she had not much in common

with the greater number of the members ; and she found that, as regarded most of them, Mrs. Belbrooke had spoken truly when she said that individually they paid little heed to the principles of which they were collectively the champions.

The posers among them, after all, were very few and seldom came to the Club except on days when they were sure of an audience to pose before. Then, indeed, they did come and pose for hours together, but with such an air of conviction, and sincerity that the pose was easily forgiven. And the mass of the members never posed at all, having no time to pose, and being too busy with the task of earning their living to trouble themselves much about abstract theories of life.

Some of them were hard-working journalists—women who would run from one end of London to the other to describe a bazaar, a wedding, or a garden party for the ladies' newspapers. Others wrote the romantic novelettes which housemaids read, at the rate of £5 for 30,000 words. Others again undertook researches at the British Museum, or catalogued private libraries, or did secretarial work for literary men. Such women were generally too tired to philosophise. For them the Club was not a place to pose in, but a place to rest in—a place where they would not be considered un-

ladylike because their boots were muddy, and they had ink upon their cuffs.

"Earning your own living is not quite the same thing as living your own life," one of them once said plaintively to Eleanor.

The distinction between the two things, however, did not lie upon the surface, and Eleanor did not perceive it all at once. What was evident was that these women earned their living, not as she had done at Tristow, but in ways that gave their minds a certain exercise and play. At least they could think and talk sometimes of the larger interests of the world, and touch the fringe of some of its larger problems. At least they were not parts of a machine, but might have individual aspirations and ambitions of their own. So, for all their hard work they seemed happy—a great deal happier than she had ever been when she had to work.

A dangerous atmosphere, perhaps, for Eleanor, who had the tendency to take everything seriously, and herself most seriously of all. But she enjoyed it, and being impressionable, was impressed, though, as was inevitable, it was the posers who impressed her most—those posers, so earnest, so sincere, so apostolic ; and so gloriously unconscious that they posed !

There were two circumstances under which they found this opportunity of posing.

Once every week for example, the members of the Club used to meet together for the purpose of intellectual recreation. One of them—one of those who had leisure to live their own lives instead of earning their own livings—used to read a paper on some subject of interest to her sex, on "The Higher Education of Man," for instance, or on "The True Use of Marriage." The author was generally a woman who, for some reason or another, did not live with her husband, and therefore spoke with authority upon such matters; and, in the course of the discussion, very daring and unconventional things were often said,—things that shocked Eleanor at first, though when she came to think them over, she often found that she agreed with them. For, after all, when the things that were said were stripped and analysed, it seemed that they amounted to little more than an assertion of a woman's right to cultivate her own temperament, and her own individuality, instead of sacrificing these to the individuality and temperament of a man, and there was nothing shocking, or profane, or blasphemous in that.

The weekly debate, then, was one of the posers' opportunities; their other opportunity was found

at the great formal receptions that were occasionally given in the Club-house. The first of these that she attended dwelt long in Eleanor's memory. It was the last of the novelties in the new life that surprised and moved her, and so, in a sense, it may be said to have marked the end of her initiation.

It was a great ceremony, celebrating the anniversary of some event of moment in the history of the Club. The time of the year was early spring, and the fresh sun sparkled on the pavement of the quiet street hardly a stone's throw distant from busy Piccadilly. A mingled line of private carriages and hansom cabs filed past the entrance, where a stalwart member of the Corps of Commissionaires, with Afghan and Egyptian medals on his breast, received them; while the dreamy music of a string-band that was playing in the hall floated through the open door-way.

An excellent band, playing admirable music, popular as well as classical; but those who had entered hardly heard it any longer. Outside they might have listened to it and enjoyed it; within, the clatter of innumerable tongues prevailed against it. For each room in the Club-house, except the smoking-room, which was shut up and silent, gave birth to a special clatter of its own. There was a clatter in the refreshment room, and a clatter in

each of the drawing-rooms; and in the hall, and on the landings and the staircase, the different clatters met and mingled, as it were the confluence of mighty streams.

Half the literary women of London were there—some of them as members but more of them as guests; for even people who habitually spoke evil of the Pioneer Club felt no reluctance to accept its hospitality at such times as this. Some of them talked of their new books, which were to be published in the autumn, or their grievances against their publishers, and other literary topics of the moment. Others, like the women of less intellectual mould who are to be met elsewhere, talked millinery, and canvassed the toilettes that they saw around them.

For the toilettes of the company were infinitely various,—so various that one was amazed to see such differences of style brought together in a single house upon a single afternoon. There were the dazzling toilettes of those who were women of fashion first and women of letters afterwards; the *outré* toilettes of actresses, who not only accepted the fashion but accentuated them, putting the dots on all the *i's*; the old-fashioned toilettes of eccentric women who chose still to affect the style that prevailed in the by-gone generation when they

first blossomed into fame; the more than tailor-made toilettes of women who had cropped their hair, and wished their dress to be the outward symbol and expression of their emancipated views; the æsthetic toilettes of women who, because they were poets, liked to clothe themselves, as it were, with an atmosphere of poetry; the simple and serviceable, but often inelegant toilettes of lady journalists, who could not afford to wear hats that might be damaged by the rain, and who buzzed about the room with little note-books, making lists of the celebrities, to be posted presently to the newspapers which they represented.

There were also a few men included in the gathering—about one man, perhaps, to twenty women. But they were not celebrated men—not men whom the Pioneers could seriously consider as their rivals in the arts. A few of them were husbands trained to act as the shadows of their wives; a few were artists who had come to make sketches of the dresses for the illustrated journals; a few, again, were those inevitable young men who seek to compass a literary reputation by attending as many literary functions as they can. Yet, strange to say, they were young men in whom the women seemed to take just as much interest as though they had been actually interesting.

Mrs. Belbrooke, who was with Eleanor, commented on the circumstance with playful irony.

"Did you ever see anything more ridiculous?" she whispered. "We modern women make the most terrible fuss about ourselves. We are always talking as if ours were the only sex that had any right to exist. Yet, whenever we get a few second-rate men among us, we immediately begin to buzz about them as if they were the Lords of Creation after all."

It might be the truth, but it was not a truth that Eleanor was prepared, at that moment, to receive. She had no eyes for any of the men that afternoon. Perhaps she had divined, by intuition, that they were men of no account. At any rate, she was no more interested in them than she was interested in the toilettes. It was the woman's day, and her eyes were only for the women, and for one of the women in particular.

For there was one woman in that assemblage who attracted more attention even than the men of no account. She was not perhaps the greatest, the wisest, the cleverest, or even the most famous woman in the room. But she was the woman of the hour—the woman about whose book London was just then talking—the woman who had voiced the cry that lay, dumb and inarticulate, in the

bosoms of so many of her sex, and given most eloquent utterance to this new demand that the woman should have the right to be herself, and that her life should be no longer an appanage of the man's but a thing apart from it, the holier and the higher because it had shaken off the fetters that had bound it from of old.

"That is Mrs. Brereton," Mrs. Belbrooke whispered, and Eleanor looked in the direction that she indicated.

Mrs. Brereton stood with her back to that flamboyant picture—an ungainly Aphrodite rising from the waves—that hangs on the drawing-room wall in the Pioneer Club, as though to typify the birth of the New Woman, naked and unashamed. A crowd, whose elements changed constantly, was gathered around her; for every one who did not know her already was eager to be presented, while every one who did know her was eager to present her friends. Her presence so dominated the corner of the room in which she held her court, that the women who were near her, but out of ear-shot, let all other topics of conversation go, in order to criticise her in confidential whispers.

"A most wonderful book," one of them murmured. "Only I found it just the least bit tedious. That 's the worst of the books every one says are

so wonderful. They 're nearly always just a little tedious."

And another :

"They say that the book tells the story of her own life ; and if that 's true, oh ! what a life she must have had."

And a third :

"Indeed she did have the most dreadful life. You would never believe the way that woman's husband treated her. Why is it, I wonder, that clever women always have such trouble with their husbands ? "

And so forth, and so forth. But Eleanor passed through the midst of the tattlers without hearing a word of what they said, and mingled with the circle that immediately surrounded Mrs. Brereton.

She was a tall and handsome woman, whose simple dress of rich black silk added to the grave dignity of her presence ; perhaps it should not be said that she was handsome, but that she had evidently been handsome once. Her life, as those who gossiped about her said, had not been the sort of life that keeps a woman beautiful beyond her natural term ; and, though all the dreadful things had happened a long time ago, there was a pained expression in her eyes, and a drawn look about the corners of her mouth that even the sunshine of

success could not expel. It was a hard face and a proud face; the face of a woman who had suffered and been strong; the face also of a woman who was conscious of a message to the world, and knew her highest happiness at the moments when she heard herself deliver it.

Eleanor looked at Mrs. Brereton and saw her, not as she really was, but through a deceptive and glorifying haze. She noted nothing of the sorrow that looked out of her eyes, just as she had heard nothing of the gossip that was being whispered at her elbow. All that she perceived was the great triumph; the great price with which the great triumph had been bought and paid for she did not even distantly divine. She saw the artistic temperament, victorious in spite of circumstances and in spite of sex, crowned with the reward that is envied even by those who know in their hearts that it ought to be despised. Like Leonardo da Vinci when he stood still in front of Raphael's masterpiece, and exclaimed, "And I also am a painter!" she felt the artistic impulse quickening in her own breast also. It seemed to her, as she stood there speechless, that she was becoming conscious of new powers and new possibilities, as well as new ambitions—that she realised, for the first time, how beautiful it must be to live for art and nothing else.

And that was the end of Eleanor's initiation.

CHAPTER VI.

SUCCESS.

TO live for art and nothing else!

That meant to write a book; and Eleanor obeyed the impulse that the new life was stirring in her, and sat down and wrote a book—the book that was described as a work of genius by the *Daily Chronicle.*

The writing of it gave her unalloyed and perfect happiness. A sense of inspiration exalted and sustained her; she lived for a period in beautiful day dreams: and, looking out from them at the rest of life, believed and felt it to be insignificant. The pleasures of the artistic temperament sufficed.

Nor was there any rude shock to her contented mood when the book was finished, and she had to seek a publisher. Mrs. Belbrooke took it for her to Mr. Court, who sat, as it were, upon a watch tower, searching the horizon for new writers. He had discovered both Mr. Duncan Deane and Mr.

Marcus Brande, and Mrs. Belbrooke insisted that he should discover Eleanor as well, reasoning with him firmly when he hummed and hawed, and hesitated.

"It is such a very morbid book," he said at first. "I always feel a little afraid to touch a morbid book. I burnt my fingers badly with the last."

And that was true. Mr. Court had lately published a morbid book for Mr. Duncan Deane—a sort of *Madame Bovary* brought up to date, and transplanted from Normandy to Camberwell. It was very clever and very brutal, but the public would have none of it while *Stiff Tales from the Prairies* was selling as fast as it could be put upon the book-stalls. Eleanor's book, he mentally added, was not nearly so clever as Mr. Duncan Deane's and ought therefore, by all the laws of probability to be even more unpopular.

Mrs. Belbrooke, however, was equal to the occasion and persuaded. "I know exactly what you 're thinking of, Mr. Court," she said, "but you must n't class all morbid books together. A morbid book is all right when there are a sufficient number of people suffering from the disease; and you may take my word for it that this disease is epidemic."

Clearly there was something in the argument.

Mr. Court hummed and hawed again; but ultimately decided on trying the experiment.

He tried it in no half-hearted way, but did his duty nobly by the book, in the large sense in which he understood his duty. That is to say, he went as a messenger before its face to prepare the way before it. He talked mysteriously of its surprising originality at the Hogarth and at the Author's Club, and at certain gatherings of literary busybodies and nobodies which he frequented. He doled out discreet scraps of information about the author to the young men who compiled the columns of literary gossip for the weekly papers. Finally he presented advance copies of the volume to three or four chosen reviewers whom he could trust. Sitting in their arm chairs, and smoking fragrant cigarettes, he nursed the book tenderly and delicately, as though it were a baby or a precious bit of china, and told the reviewers that he respected their judgment, and was sure that they would find it a very remarkable piece of work. Finally he published it, in a morbid binding, with a weird allegorical device upon the title-page.

Then Mrs. Belbrooke's prediction was fulfilled, and she was able to go to Mr. Court, and say:

"I told you so!"

For the book really made a considerable stir,

though old-fashioned people who were pressed to read it by their juniors could not understand its vogue.

"The style," they said, "is imitative, and the grammar is shaky, and the observation is superficial, half the stops are in the wrong places. What on earth can be the reason why the book is being talked about?"

But the reason was, as Mrs. Belbrooke knew, a very simple one. The book was being talked about because it was a morbid book, and because the disease was epidemic.

It was a soul study—the study of the author's own soul as she had misunderstood it; and it told a story which the author fancied might easily have been her story, if circumstances had been a little different. It told, in short, the old, old story of a woman at war with her environment—a complex woman, condemned to live a simple healthy life, and therefore languishing as an exotic flower would languish, if it were planted in the garden instead of blooming in the hot-house. Now and again the woman got passing glimpses of the morbid life for which she longed, and which to her seemed the only natural life; but she could never quite attain to it, and therefore pined away and died, and people wondered what had discontented her, seeing

that her home was comfortable and her husband was esteemed. The chapter which set tongues wagging about the book was a chapter which described how the heroine nearly became the mistress of a man she did not love, because she thought that this might give her the morbid excitement that she craved. She drew back because her sense of duty was too strong for her, but afterwards she wished that she had been born without a sense of duty.

Some of the reviewers spoke unkindly of the book. To clever young men, who were conscious that their own prose style was better, but who had never made a similar success, its vogue appeared a personal affront. They said, therefore, that it was an affront to literature, and they declared that Fielding and Smollett would have blushed to read it. But their severity was unavailing. For there was the *Daily Chronicle* describing it as a work of genius, and there were Mr. Court's young friends insisting that it conveyed a message to the age.

Moreover, the disease, as Mrs. Belbrooke said, was epidemic. Modern women said to themselves : "This is my case, I have felt something of that sort sometimes" ; so that the book was read and talked about, and Eleanor discovered that she was a personage.

It pleased her to be a personage, but she bore her honours gracefully. No one could accuse her of assuming airs and affectations. For, at bottom, the thing that pleased her was not the praise she got, or the knowledge that her name was often in the papers, but the sense that she had done something—that she had proved herself an artist. She was quite sure now that she had proved herself an artist.

There was no battle in her case, between the claims of art and the claims of the domestic duties and affections. She had no children to distract her mind and occupy her time; and she was glad of it. It seemed to her a wise decree of Providence that clever women should have fewer children as a rule than stupid women. Nor was it necessary in order that her house should be well kept that she should give much attention to the keeping of it. Having money to spend, she could delegate that task to servants.

Her husband too was not exacting, and did not complain.

"I daresay we shall both be happier," he said, "if we both have separate interests of our own. I expect people generally bore each other when they have n't"; and the words seemed to her to breathe the spirit of a true philosophy.

So they continued to live together tranquilly, he absorbed in his art and she in hers, yet each interested to a certain extent in the other's work, feeling a reflected satisfaction in the other's triumphs, and able at times to offer the other a helpful criticism or suggestion. Looked at from the outside, it seemed an ideal life and, at this period, it was only from the outside that Eleanor herself looked at it. Afterwards, when she looked at it from the inside, she found something wanting there; but so long as she looked at it from the outside she was satisfied.

She might have found other interests to fill her life with, if she had needed them. She need not, for instance, have lived without a love affair, merely because it so happened that she did not love her husband. She was beautiful and lived in a country bordering on Bohemia, and could see that the path leading to scandalous romance was short, and that in London as at Barnstaple, there were men who would have been glad to be her lovers if she would have let them.

There was, for example, Mr. Duncan Deane, who was perhaps the only man in London who suspected that Eleanor did not love her husband. He not merely suspected it, he was quite sure of it; and that, not because of any hint that Eleanor

had given him, but because it was an article of faith with him that no married woman ever loved her husband. His morbid stories were all so many illustrations of that theory, and it was suspected that his private life had included endeavours to console the sufferers. Perhaps it was his pity for them that explained his constant air of melancholy, and his many pessimistic speeches.

There was a sentence or two about him in the diary in which it was her habit to record her intimate impressions.

"Again to-day, something in Mr. Duncan Deane's manner which made me think that he wanted to make love to me. He saw in time that I did not wish it, and he stopped. I certainly don't want him to make love to me; but still I can't help liking him, so I won't quarrel with him, if he can understand without needing to be told."

And Mr. Duncan Deane did understand without needing to be told, and Eleanor permitted him to remain her friend.

There was also the old Barnstaple lover, the Reverend Paul Devine, who had left his country curacy to take another in Soho. Through Walter Temple's introductions he had fallen in with the Kensington Bohemians, and when he was not engaged in zealous mission work among the poor,

would often dine at the tables of worldly people, who never asked him to say grace either before or after meat. Once or twice, indeed, he went so far as to sing, "I fear no foe" at Stornoway's; but one of the black and white draughtsmen there caricatured him for a comic paper, and after that, he would not sing it any more.

About him too there was an entry in Eleanor's diary.

"I am really afraid that he is still in love with me. He is always so melancholy, and it can hardly be his mission work that depresses him like that. However he is very good. He hardly ever ventures to remind me of old times. It is only his manner that betrays him."

It was very different with her other lover, the *decadent* poet, Mr. Marcus Brande—a pale young man, with long black hair, and an addiction to absinthe, who used to drape himself like an art fabric, over the back of an armchair, and recite verses full of veiled improprieties, in a plaintive, murmuring monotone.

Excessive study of the literature of modern France had given Mr. Brande an undue daring where married women were concerned, and one day he made a passionate declaration.

He did more. Before Eleanor had time to

speak her indignation and surprise, he began to traduce her husband to her.

"If you only knew," he began, "if you only knew all the things that I could tell you. But you don't know. Of course you don't know. A married woman never knows."

But he had no chance of proceeding any further. She was not even curious to know how his sentence would have ended.

"Mr. Brande, I forbid you ever to speak to me again," was all the answer that he got; and there was that in her manner which made it impossible for him to continue.

For Eleanor did not want the love either of Mr. Marcus Brande or of any other man.

Even if she had felt the desire to have a lover, she would have trampled on the desire and crushed it. Some prejudice—some sense of duty—would have restrained her. For she had been brought up in the country where the sense of duty is a more serious thing than in the towns, being reckoned even higher than the sense of honour.

She was not conscious, however, of any such desire. For the time being, her art filled her life. To stand aloof from life and study it; to observe human conduct and analyse human motives; to shut her eyes and travel far away into a world

peopled with her own imaginings—these seemed to her the great and precious realities of life. The rest was only incident and episode, and things that hardly mattered.

Yet the day came when her eyes were opened, and she discovered that she did, after all, want something more than art could give her.

The discovery had all the appearance of a sudden intuition. Doubtless, if she could have fully analysed the operations of her mind, she would have found that what Mr. Duncan Deane called, "the subliminal consciousness" had been at work preparing for it; doubtless, that is to say, she had been thinking of these things at times when she supposed herself to be thinking of quite other things. But, though she had often heard Mr. Duncan Deane talk about the "subliminal consciousness," and had even asked him what he meant by it, she had never fully understood his explanations; and now the discovery seemed to her like a mysterious revelation whispered without warning in her ear.

The moment of time when it came to her was midnight and the place was her bedroom where she was used to work.

The house was quiet; for Walter was at one of his clubs that evening, and the servants had gone

to bed. Beyond the occasional rattle of a passing hansom there came no noises from the street; and the only other sound of human energy was the faint monotonous tinkling of a piano in one of the studios across the road, where a lonely painter cheered himself with selections from the latest comic operas before he went to sleep.

Eleanor sat on a revolving chair, before a desk of bamboo lacquer-work. A tall lamp, with a pale green shade, stood on the floor beside her, and threw its soft light upon her manuscript, while the rest of the room remained obscure and dim, save for the coals that glowed warmly in the grate and sent weird shadows flying fitfully across the walls.

For greater ease and comfort, she had taken off her dress and wore her dressing-gown. Partly for comfort, and partly also perhaps because there seemed to be something romantic in the act—something mystically in attune with the work that she was doing—she had undone her hair and let it flow loosely round her shoulders. But, with every condition favourable to work, she found it impossible to write a single phrase that satisfied her.

"I think I must be tired," she said.

But she had just the same difficulty in the morning, when she was fresh, as now in the evening when she worked with strong tea to stimulate her

forces, so that she knew that this could not really be the reason. The real reason must be more subtle, must depend in some way on the work itself that she was struggling with.

Laying her pen down upon the desk, and leaning backwards in her chair, and putting her hand over her eyes, to shield them from the light, she asked herself what it was that baffled her and why it was so much harder to write her second novel than her first. Then the answer when she found it, was a simple one: but she had to think her way to it laboriously.

Like her first novel this was a morbid story that she wished to write. She could not help it. In the ordinary circumstances of life—when she went shopping or paid her calls, or poured out the tea for her husband at the breakfast table—she took life in as serene and healthy a temper as her neighbours; but when she had a pen in her hand, and a pile of manuscript paper in front of her, her imaginations always ran in morbid channels. It seemed to her that when she was not morbid she was commonplace. It did not occur to her that it might be possible to be morbid and commonplace at once.

This time, however, she was trying to cut deeper than before—to strike profounder notes of human

passion—and her grief was that she could not handle human passion to her satisfaction. What was even more serious she could not handle it to the satisfaction of any of the friendly critics whose opinion she had asked.

She had asked three opinions and the first was Walter's.

But Walter had not helped her. She had come to him at the least opportune of hours, when some new fancy of his own was germinating in his mind, and he lay back in his lounge-chair dreaming of it, seemingly idle, but really working hard. Her questions bored him, therefore, though he tried his hardest not to show it, and he had nothing very luminous to say.

"I don't know, my dear. I daresay it 's all right. It sounds a little high, but it is n't fair to criticise half a chapter by itself."

That was all he ventured on, and she had the good sense not to press him further, or try to make him argue the matter out with her.

"You are n't so instructive as you used to be," she said, and left him, laughing to cover her retreat, and hide her disappointment at his want of interest in her work.

Next she read her manuscript to Mrs. Belbrooke, who criticised it candidly.

"Not convincing, my dear," was Mrs. Belbrooke's verdict. "You 've aimed at drama, and only arrived at melodrama. Better lock it up in your desk for a month or two, and then try your hand at it again."

Eleanor did as she was told, and having done it, sought fresh counsel, this time from Mr. Duncan Deane.

And Mr. Duncan Deane's criticism was the severest and cruellest of all. He was not content with trying to tell her the truth about her book; he wanted also to tell her the truth about her soul. For Mr. Duncan Deane found a sort of holy joy in telling people the truth about their souls, and drawing lurid pictures for them of the wonderful and illuminating emotions which he believed them to have failed to sound.

"You really want my candid opinion, Mrs. Temple?" he asked in grave solemn tones which made it clear that his candid opinion was very far from favourable.

Eleanor was a little frightened but replied that of course his candid opinion was what she wanted.

"Then I will give it to you in a nutshell, Mrs. Temple. You have n't lived it yet."

"I 'm not sure that I quite understand you, Mr. Deane," she answered.

"Yet my meaning is quite simple, Mrs. Temple. I mean exactly what I said. You have never lived it. You are writing of things that you have never felt, of emotions that you have only known from hearsay. One may write of a country that one has never visited, and make no mistakes worth speaking of if one is careful; but when you start to write of a passion that has never shaken your own soul you are bound for certain shipwreck. Think of it! You sit down to write a story of human suffering and passion. What do you know, what can you know, of human suffering and passion? When have you ever suffered? When have you ever——"

He stopped himself abruptly, suddenly perceiving that to tell a married woman that she had never loved was indiscreet, even if no harsher adjective were called for.

"Forgive me," he said, "I did n't mean that exactly. But I think you take my meaning. I mean that if we want to write true stories we must write them with our own heart's blood, and that until some of our heart's blood has been spilt, we do better to leave the deeper themes alone."

Then, fired by his subject, he went on at length, citing the stormy histories of Byron and Shelley, of Sappho and George Sand, hinting that there

must be other stormy histories that the world has never heard of in the blameless lives of Milton and Tennyson, and Longfellow, and finally declining upon more intimate personalities, and telling how he himself had once been driven to drink chloral mixed with absinthe, while he lived down a tragedy that had made his life a burden to him.

He preached the doctrine, as he always preached all his doctrines, with a fiery apostolic eagerness. A woman might easily have fallen in love with him by listening to it, and so have helped him on from his old tragedy to a new one. But Eleanor, having come to him only for literary counsel, heard only the voice of the literary counsellor, and refused to take an interest in the private passions of the man.

Still he had impressed her more than either her husband or Mrs. Belbrooke, and now that she sat in her bedroom at the midnight, striving to make out where it was that she had blundered, and how she must alter so as to improve, his was the criticism that thrust itself most imperiously before.

"He was right," she owned to herself, "absolutely right. This stuff that I have written is n't genuine. It rings rather more false than a *Bow Bells* novelette. And why? I suppose he was right about that too. Because I 'm trying to write about things that I have n't learnt to understand.

Because I 'm trying to write about love, when I 've never really been in love."

She said the last words over dreamily, with just the suspicion of a smile curling the corners of her mouth, and her thoughts ranged away from the work that lay in front of her and circled round her personal and private life—the life that she lived as a woman, and forgot all about when she sat down to try and be an artist.

"I wish I were in love," she murmured. "It would be very helpful."

That was the first thought—the mere wish for love as an experience that she might use, a chord in her being that she might play upon, to make her book. But the second thought grew inevitably out of it.

"I suppose one is only a maimed, one-sided sort of creature when one has never been in love."

As the thought gave birth to the phrase, so the phrase reacted on the thought, and filled her with a vague sense of the tawdry incompleteness of the life that she was living—the sense of something wanting, she could not say exactly what.

In the old unhappy days at Tristow, she had known exactly what she wanted. She had wanted to be rid of certain definite chains that fettered the free play and full development of her better pos-

sibilities, and what she wanted had been given her. The chains had been struck off, and the restraints removed. She had had full freedom to follow her temperament whither it might lead her. It had led her to the illusion of fame, and presently, for all she knew, might lead her to the reality. And now, having got so far, she found herself wondering whether she had not passed something better worth having on the road.

Doubtless the strong tea and the late hours had something to do with her reflections. At all events she tried to think so.

"I suppose one never is quite one 's true self when one is alone at this hour of the morning," she said, and so saying, locked up her manuscripts, and prepared to go to bed, supposing that with a night's rest the troublesome sensation would be quelled, and she would go on living pretty much as she had lived before.

She did not understand that that evening's meditations must needs mark an irretrievable step onwards in her inner life, that truth she was only beginning to divine dimly on that other evening when, a little later, she sat with her husband in the firelight, and startled him with that strange saying:

"It 's an odd thing, Walter—is n't it?—that you and I have never fallen in love with each other?"

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. BELBROOKE'S APOLOGUE.

SOMEHOW or other, after a lapse of time, Eleanor managed to get over the difficulty of the troublesome chapter by borrowing freely from the experiences of others.

She borrowed something from Mr. Duncan Deane, but not very much. Most of Mr. Duncan Deane's spiritual tragedies had taken place in remote and barbarous countries, where the conditions were too licentious and sanguinary for her purpose; and of the rest, he only spoke in riddles, as a man who felt that many reputations would tremble in the balance if he were explicit.

She borrowed something also from Mr. Pyne, who drank too much whiskey, one evening, in her husband's studio, and so fell into a maudlin mood and confessed to having fallen in love with models. There was one model who had jilted him long since, to marry a respectable news agent living in the King's Road, Chelsea. There was another

whom he now believed to be the most virtuous as well as the most beautiful woman in the world. Most of all, however, Eleanor was indebted to Lily Marston.

For Lily Marston came to tea with her one afternoon looking radiantly happy, and when questioned, blushed and told her news.

"Yes, Mrs. Temple, you may congratulate me. Captain Armitage has asked me to marry him, and I'm going to, and he won't hear of our waiting any longer than the beginning of the summer."

Then followed a string of girlish confidences to which Eleanor listened with an interest that was artistic as well as personal, finding when the talk was over that it had given her a sensation that seemed likely to help her with her book, and lift it above the level of the novelettes.

So she bridged the awkward gap after a fashion and got onto surer ground where she could work with greater confidence, and in the mornings would often manage to do as good work as she was ever capable of doing. But there was always this difference between the mornings and the evenings with her; that, though in the mornings her work might sometimes be a little more interesting than her life, in the evenings her life was always vastly more interesting than her work. Is it not the

usual experience of those whose life and work make rival claims upon their time and thoughts?

Eleanor, therefore, was always most human in the evenings,—especially on the evenings when she tried to write. For, at these times, she would always stop to think, and the thought that always came to her was that to live was worth more than to put a philosophy of life on paper and get it printed in a book. And then she would feel bitterly, not so much that she needed love as that she ought to need it, and would muse of this, night after night, until the dread of living beyond the proper age for passion without ever having felt it, began to haunt her like an evil spirit.

What then could be the reason why she and Walter did not love each other? Again and again she asked herself the question, and the riddle baffled her. But the strange thing was that she should have heard the explanation, in part if not in whole, without understanding it, or perceiving that it had any bearing whatsoever on her case.

She heard it in Mrs. Brereton's drawing-room, on the fourth floor of certain motley mansions in West Kensington, where there was an informal reception every Tuesday afternoon, and much of the talk was often earnest and advanced.

As a rule the rooms were crowded, and the earnest utterances of the speakers clashed and commingled with each other, leaving only a vague general impression of earnestness. On this particular afternoon, however, it happened to be raining, with the result that fewer visitors than usual arrived, and the talk by degrees tended to be general. The only men present were Captain Armitage, whom Lily Marston had attracted there, and a Mr. Thorpe, who was a very ordinary sort of person. The women were women who wrote, including, besides Eleanor and Mrs. Brereton, Mrs. Belbrooke, Mrs. Morecomb, and Mrs. Barnes.

They talked of many things—particularly of the prospects of the forthcoming publishing season, and their projected contributions to it ; and then the conversation fell into the hands of Mrs. Brereton.

For Mrs. Brereton meditated going to America on a lecturing tour. Generous terms had been offered her by Major Pond if she would expound her views on the relation of the sexes from the platform ; and she wanted someone to suggest an appropriate and attractive title for her lecture.

"It should be a short, sharp, crisp title," she said, "and I think the words 'The New Woman' ought to figure in it."

"The New Woman and her Old Man," suggested Mrs. Belbrooke, whose cardinal principle in life seemed to be never to be serious at the same time as other people.

The two men smiled, and Lily Marston was only hindered from giggling by the recollection that Mrs. Brereton was her aunt and might afterwards lecture her for her frivolity. Mrs. Brereton, however, ignored the irreverent interruption, and continued with her enthusiasm undismayed.

"You see," she said, "the world has not quite learnt to realise the New Womanhood as yet. So many people are unable to distinguish the New Woman from the Old Blue Stocking. They associate her with spectacles——"

"And scenes," threw in Mrs. Belbrooke; but the only notice which Mrs. Brereton took of the remark was to begin a new sentence instead of finishing the old one.

She went on:

"They do not understand the woman who is resolved to be taken as seriously as the men take themselves; the woman who regards her individuality as a treasure and a trust, the woman who is resolved to set up for men a moral standard as elevated as her own. The mass of women themselves, I am afraid, are satisfied to imitate the

men's crass attitude in the matter. Still the New Woman exists. She has discovered herself without man's help, and it only remains for her to explain herself in language which it shall be impossible to misunderstand. Do you not agree with me, Captain Armitage?"

Captain Armitage started at finding himself thus pointedly appealed to on a matter beyond his ordinary range. He answered as diplomatically as he could.

"I should think it would make a very popular sort of lecture anyhow, don't you know?" he said.

Mrs. Brereton protested that popularity was not what she aimed at.

"Or rather," she added, "I value popularity chiefly because it may help me to get a hearing for what I want to say."

"Which is?" asked Mr. Thorpe.

"What I want to say," replied Mrs. Brereton, "is anything that may hasten the advent of the New Womanhood, and encourage other women, less thoughtful or less fortunate than we are, to recognise and claim their rights."

Captain Armitage whispered to Lily Marston something about woman's right to ride in smoking carriages; and Lily Marston whispered back something about woman's right to wear knickerbockers.

It was very vulgar, but it was not overheard, and Mrs. Brereton proceeded to make her meaning clear.

"I am not talking about votes at the elections, or seats on the County Council, or anything of that sort. Such things are only details,—at the most they are only means to an end. My claim is merely that woman, as a reasonable and moral being, should assert herself as the equal of the man; that she should perceive that her duty to herself is more important than her duty to him; that she should resent the idea of being merely a doll for the man to play with in his leisure hours; that she should live her own life and cultivate her own temperament because it is her own, and is therefore of the first importance to her,—just as freely as her husband."

It was a lucid statement, albeit, as it seemed to Eleanor, unnecessarily combative in form. She, at all events, had been able to cultivate her temperament without making such a fuss about it; and therefore the fuss which Mrs. Brereton was making struck her as excessive. Mr. Thorpe, however, had a question that he wished to put.

"And would you urge a woman to unfold this programme to her husband before her marriage?" he inquired, meaning to add that, in such a case,

her suitor might find the light too dazzling, as Moses did when he stood on holy ground.

But Mrs. Brereton saw the trap that was being set for her, and replied evasively.

"It should be understood," she said. "If you men had not been allowed so much of your own way in the past there would be no need to tell you anything so obvious."

True, Eleanor reflected, Walter had not needed to be told. It was fortunate ; for, looking back upon the early days she was not at all sure that, if he had, she would have dared to tell him.

There was a moment's pause in the conversation. Then Mrs. Belbrooke, and this time the company was surprised to find Mrs. Belbrooke serious.

"After all," she said, "the great question with theories is : How do they work out in practice? And the great question which the New Women have to ask themselves is : Does this New Womanliness make them any happier?"

Mrs. Brereton lifted her eyebrows as one who honestly disdained such utilitarian criteria of conduct, Mrs. Morecomb looked shocked and Eleanor surprised. But the first to speak was Captain Armitage, who exclaimed :

"That 's a devilish good idea of yours, Mrs. Belbrooke, I wish I 'd thought of it myself."

"Let us make it a personal matter," Mrs. Belbrooke continued. "Personalities make the dryest subjects interesting. We are all new women here, except Lily, who is too young to be affected by the question. But all the rest of us have practised introspection as a fine art as long as we can remember. Let us do a little introspection now and let me be the grand inquisitor. I will put it to each of you in turn. Only I shall leave out Mrs. Temple, because she has become famous while she is young and it is difficult to be unhappy under those conditions."

It is even more difficult to be unhappy while things of that sort are being said to one,—especially if one wants to think that one deserves them but is not quite sure. So Eleanor, though she blushed, offered no profession of unhappiness; and Mrs. Belbrooke resumed:

"I will begin with you, Mrs. Brereton. You have been a New Woman longer than any of us. Have you been happy?"

Mrs. Brereton answered, with the grave dignity gone and to whom the "Stoic Epicurean acceptance of life" is a reality and not a phrase,

"Is that a fair question, Mrs. Belbrooke? You know that there have been circumstances in my life which have necessarily made the highest

happiness impossible for me. To have lived my own life as I have done has been a great comfort, a great consolation to me. But, things being as they were, it would have been too much to hope that it should make me really happy."

They all knew enough of her story—which was a very ordinary story of an ill-assorted marriage, ending in the divorce court—to understand her meaning. Mrs. Belbrooke put the same question to Mrs. Morecomb.

"It certainly is a good thing," Mrs. Morecomb answered, "to have a temperament all to oneself; and yet there 's a sort of loneliness about it sometimes that I can't quite understand. Still I think I too have the right to put the blame on circumstances if I choose to."

Perhaps she had. For her life too had had a story in it, though no one knew for certain whether she or the man who married her had been to blame.

Mrs. Belbrooke left her and turned to Mrs. Barnes.

And Mrs. Barnes' answer was not a great deal more cheerful. She was n't exactly unhappy, she said. Only she could n't quite understand why she was n't a great deal happier. Perhaps Carlyle had hit the mark when he had said that no one had any right to happiness.

This brought a blundering protest from Captain Armitage, who boldly declared that all the women had a right to be happy, especially the pretty ones, and that in the service there was nothing a man liked better than making a pretty woman happy. It was really a profounder remark than it appeared to be ; but no one except Lily Marston regarded the philosophy of it, and Mrs. Belbrooke went on with her lay sermon. She was really quite serious for once.

"I 'm going to do a most inartistic thing," she said. "I 'm going to draw a moral. Worse than that, I 'm going to do it in the most inartistic way, by telling you a story with a purpose. My excuse must be that I am more interested in the purpose than in the story."

"That 's what 's the matter with most of the women who write stories now-a-days," was Captain Armitage's interjection. For he was not in the movement, and his favourite authors were White Melville and Hawley Smart. However, he did not interrupt, and Mrs. Belbrooke proceeded :

"Once upon a time there was a girl. I will call her Ella, though her real name was n 't anything nearly so pretty. She was a nice girl and a clever girl,—more particularly a clever girl. Perhaps she was not quite so clever as she thought herself,—

few of us are; but still she was distinctly clever. At any rate she was clever enough to have discovered the importance of 'living her own life,' before Mrs. Brereton and Mrs. Morecomb had begun to write books to popularise the practice. With these ideas in her head, she married a man who was quite as clever as she was. He was n't a Monster like most of the men whom we New Women marry. Far from it. He was a very good fellow, and everybody said it was a most suitable match, and they ought to have been very happy together. But they were n't."

It was natural that Mrs. Belbrooke's listeners should have suspected that she was telling them the story of her own life, because they were all accustomed to put bits of their lives into their stories, therefore they looked for revelations, and were surprised to find that there were none worth speaking of.

"The old story, I suppose," said Mrs. Brereton. "The ghosts of a past that he fancied he had finished with got active."

"Nothing of the sort, I assure you," Mrs. Belbrooke answered. "If there were any ghosts belonging to his past, he had managed to lay them. Men mostly do. There were no explosions, no collapse of a house of cards, or anything of that

sort. All that happened was that Ella found herself unhappy. Not stormily unhappy, you know —quietly unhappy in a way that she could n't understand or analyse. She just suffered from the numbing sense that there was something wanting."

"Then surely,"—this time it was Eleanor who asked—"her husband must have been unkind to her?"

"Not in the least. He was n't even unfaithful to her, which is a more frequent thing. In point of fact, he seemed almost as unhappy as she was. He too, felt that marriage had not given him all that he had expected of it. He still had his interests and ambitions, and she still had hers; but neither of them found those interests and ambitions, absorbing as they were, quite so satisfying as before. Ultimately, without any preliminary scandal, they just ceased to live together, and their mutual friends talked about incompatibility of temper. But that was only half the truth."

It seemed to Mrs. Brereton to be just the sort of story that she needed to illustrate her contemplated lecture. She hastened to draw the inference that seemed good to her.

"I understand," she said. "One sees such cases every day. The man could not comprehend that

the woman should wish to be something better than his plaything. She felt that the man wanted to cramp her energies, to crush her individuality, to starve her higher nature."

They were the old, old phrases which she had made, and which had been made her in return. But Mrs. Belbrooke disappointed her.

"I don't think so," she answered, "I meant to say, Ella did not think so. He was quite proud of her when she managed to do things that people talked about. He was as puzzled and as pained as she was at the mysterious cloud that always seemed to hang between them; and they never quarrelled to any extent worth speaking of. Before they parted, however, they had a serious explanation."

"And were they agreed about the explanation?" asked Mrs. Barnes.

"Yes. It was a long talk, and it would tire you if I told you all they said. But the gist of it was summed up in a speech of his. Men may not be so finely organised as women are, but they are better at summing things up clearly.

"'It hasn't been incompatibility of temper, Ella,' he said. 'We've always been the best of friends. It's been something much more serious. Where we've made our mistake has been trying to

keep two temperaments going in one house. We thought it would answer, but now we see clearly that it won't. The artistic temperament, you see, is always selfish,—not in the ordinary way, but in a special way of its own. It wants to spend most of its time in a little world of its own, which it has imagined for itself. When it comes down into the ordinary world what it wants is rest and sympathy, and perhaps grateful appreciation, and not to meet another artistic temperament, which is all absorbed in itself, and in its own little world. That is what has been the trouble in our case. We were each interested in the other, but we were both more interested in ourselves. You could not efface yourself; I could not efface myself. Both of us, perhaps, were doing too important work to be effaced. All the same it was a mistake to bring two temperaments into a house where there was only room for one.' "

She stopped and Mrs. Brereton uttered the inevitable protest.

"So I was right, you see. She was the victim, the old, old theory—the theory that a woman has no right to be anything more than a man's plaything."

But Mrs. Belbrooke denied it, driving her point well home.

"Ella did n't think so," she answered. "To this day Ella traces all her troubles to the fact that she introduced a second temperament into a house where there was only room for one."

That ended the apologue—for it was an apologue rather than a story, seeing that it threw light upon a multitude of cases without being literally true of any—and the only one of the listeners who was properly impressed by it was Lily Marston. For she whispered to Captain Armitage that she was afraid she had n't got a temperament, and she hoped he did n't mind.

To which the man of war replied, in a confidential whisper, that he was very glad to hear it, because, as far as he could make out, temperaments were awfully bad for the complexion, don't you know.

But Eleanor, for whom the apologue should have had, perhaps, a deeper moral meaning, than for any of the others, failed, at the time, to draw any moral meaning from it whatsoever. All that she felt was compassion for Mrs. Belbrooke, whom, she supposed, as all the others did, to have been telling the story of her own unhappiness.

For she was very fond of Mrs. Belbrooke and could not understand how any man could have been unhappy with her.

She went so far as to ask her afterwards whether it was a true story that she had told.

"Partly, my dear," was the reply. "Only when one tells a true story, one always has to touch it up a little here and there to make it more effective."

CHAPTER VIII.

A PORTRAIT.

WITHOUT guessing that it might contain the answer to the riddle that was puzzling her, Eleanor was very interested in Mrs. Belbrooke's apologue. Since it was a story partly true and partly false, and touched up carefully so as to be more effective, she wanted to know what had been added or left out, and which were the artistic touches. And as she could not well press Mrs. Belbrooke herself too hardly in the matter, she sought illumination from another source.

She told the story, just as she had heard it, to Mr. Duncan Deane, and wanted to hear what comment he would make. For Mr. Duncan Deane always spoke with an air of authority concerning the secrets of the human soul, and though he often credited healthy souls with hidden maladies, yet, where there was a disease, he was sometimes quick to diagnose it. Had he not discovered, without

being told, that Eleanor's own soul had never been shaken by unruly passions?

The apologue, then, which to Eleanor was nothing but a story was to him nothing but a case. He adjusted his *pince-nez* and listened to it with the air with which a physician listens to the narrative of a patient's symptoms. He asked a question or two, to elicit the graver and more momentous symptoms, and then he delivered himself oracularly.

"There is something left out in that story, Mrs. Temple," he said, speaking solemnly, much as the doctor does to a patient whom he suspects of trying to hide from him that he is a secret drinker.

"What is left out, Mr. Deane?" Eleanor asked; and Mr. Duncan Deane dropped his voice, and looking her full in the eyes, answered mysteriously,

"Sex."

"Sex, Mr. Deane?"

"Yes, Mrs. Temple, sex. Temperament sometimes counts for much in life, but sex always counts for more; and it is precisely with the most sensitively organised temperaments that sex counts for most. This is no idle theory of mine, but solid fact, with sound physiological reasons behind it."

"We might skip the physiology, Mr. Deane," Eleanor suggested. "But how do you consider that sex enters into Mrs. Belbrooke's story?"

"How?" replied Mr. Duncan Deane. "Why, in the way in which sex enters into every story of an unhappy married life. Surely you will not tell me that a woman, whatever her temperament, is cured of the need for love because it happens that she does not love her husband. I tell you it is not cramped energies but starved affections that are the crying curse of the modern woman's life. I firmly believe that every woman has a great genius for affection, and if her husband, whether by his fault or by his folly, fails to satisfy her cravings—"

It was at the end of some such speech as that that Duncan Deane was always in danger of gliding into a declaration of his own great passion. But the tempestuous generalities always frightened Eleanor in time, and made her say something to turn his perfervid eloquence into another channel.

"But about men, Mr. Deane?" she asked. "You ought to be more at home, you know, in that part of the subject."

And Duncan Deane answered in his most impressive manner:

"No man is passionless, Mrs. Temple, and the man with the artistic temperament least of all. For, as I told you the very first time we talked together, art is a fungus growth, and passion is the soil in which it flourishes. And that is why I say

that the story you have just told me is a story with the sex left out, and that it must be reconstructed, with the sex put in, before it can have any interest or even any meaning for anyone who listens to it."

And, with a sudden thought happily inspiring him, he added:

"By Jove, I 'll write that story myself to-night, and try to show exactly where the sex does come into it."

He proceeded to discuss titles and sketch situations for the story, and so quickened Eleanor's interest to the point of offering some suggestions which he did not see his way to use. After he had left her, she thought over what he had said and wondered.

Was he right in saying that passion was the soil in which art flourished best? Her own experience did not point that way, for she certainly had known no great passion, and yet she believed herself to be an artist. Still she had the feeling growing on her that, with passion to help her, she might be a greater artist, so that she was timorous of trusting this experience.

Then there was that other saying that no man is passionless,—the man with an artistic temperament least of all. Was that one of the deep truths of

human nature, or merely a guess thrown out at random by a man with stormier passions than his neighbours? Clearly much hinged on the answer to that question. For, if no man were passionless, and if Walter's feeling for her was only friendship untouched by passion——

She shrank from finishing that sentence; but it gave a new turn to her fancies none the less, and she used to sit wondering what it was that she would read in her husband's heart if it were opened and laid bare to her.

Without offering any sort of confidences, she strove to get light indirectly by questioning Mrs. Belbrooke, making her questions quite impersonal.

"Do you think it ever happens," she asked her, "that a man goes through life without a love-affair?"

"Of course, my dear," Mrs. Belbrooke answered. "Stock-brokers and that sort of person do it by the hundred."

For it is an axiom in that little artistic coterie that "stock-brokers and that sort of person" knew none of the refined emotions, but only hunger and thirst, and savage lust, and greed for gold. It was only, the artistic people argued, by their greed for gold that "stock-brokers and that sort of person" were differentiated from the lower animals.

So Eleanor smiled at a reply which seemed to her irrelevant.

"I don't mean stock-brokers," she explained. "I mean men,—the sort of men one meets and talks to. Some of them get married, of course, and some of them don't. But do you suppose that any of them are able to get through life without a love affair?"

"My dear, I did n't know they ever tried," was Mrs. Belbrooke's answer. "I suppose they 're obliged to, sometimes, if they stutter, or have hare-lips, or some other forbidding infirmity. Otherwise——"

"Yes, otherwise?"

"Well, otherwise, why should they?"

"An artist, for instance," Eleanor suggested, "might be so wrapped up in his art that he would have no time to fall in love."

Mrs. Belbrooke smiled.

"I suppose he might,—in one of your stories," she said.

"But in real life?"

"In real life, as you must be aware, it is not an unknown thing for an artist to love his wife."

"And if he does n't love his wife?"

As Mrs. Belbrooke evidently supposed that she and Walter loved each other, she could put the

question without fear that her motive for putting it would be suspected.

"In that case, I suppose," said Mrs. Belbrooke, "he goes out and gets his emotions where he can."

"But can't he ever get on without emotions?" Eleanor persisted.

"My dear, why should he? So many women are complaisant that the average man finds emotions quite easy to get, and life without emotions is too monstrously grey for anything. I daresay you 're still young enough to believe that art alone supplies a man with all the emotions that he needs, but when you 're a little older you 'll know better. Art is n't an end in itself any more than stock-broking is; and the poet would be even more miserable if he had to spend all his life in his study reading and writing poetry, than the stock-broker would be if he had to spend all his time on a desert island trying to forecast the price of railway debentures from the traffic returns. Besides, the artist needs emotions. If he could n't get them, he would n't be able to be an artist."

Eleanor raised yet another objection.

"But I have sometimes thought," she said, "that emotions might hinder the artist in his work, and prevent him from concentrating all his mind on it."

"I daresay they do," Mrs. Belbrooke answered. "I could understand an artist saying of emotions, as somebody in the classics said of his wife, that he could n't live either with them or without them, and so going down into the country to escape from them from time to time. But I 'm pretty sure that, when he came back to town his first thought would be to look them up again with greater energy than ever."

"Unless," Eleanor protested, "he were prevented by a sense of duty. I suppose some artists have a sense of duty."

"My dear, they all have it, but it is an absolutely useless faculty because they never act on it. In fact it is worse than useless, because it only makes wickedness uncomfortable without preventing it. After all, it requires a theologian to explain how a sense of duty can slam the door on an emotion, when the emotion is the heavier weight of the two; the mere philosopher is powerless before the problem."

"Then you don't blame the man in such a case?" Eleanor interjected.

"I never blame anybody," Mrs. Belbrooke answered. "It 's too much of a responsibility. But I daresay the man who does n't love his wife feels pretty much in the position of the man who

has had a hand without trumps dealt to him at whist, and I can understand that the game doesn't interest him much until the time comes to shuffle and deal again. Emotions in life, you see, are the analogue of trumps in whist. Some of them are worth more than others but all of them are worth something."

Eleanor was shocked, but did not say so, for fear lest Mrs. Belbrooke might add something that would shock her more. And, when she came to think the conversation over, and separate, so far as might be, the cynicisms from the sense of it, she found plenty of food for meditation.

"No man is passionless, and the man with the artistic temperament least of all."

That was the essence of Mrs. Belbrooke's sparkling speeches, just as it had been the solemn summary of Duncan Deane's philosophy of life. She said the sentence over to herself beneath her breath, and felt vague apprehensions springing in her mind.

For what followed? If no man was passionless, then Walter was not, and if she had not touched his passions, then it seemed to follow that some other woman had.

The mere suspicion that such a thing might be was enough to rouse her to a sort of jealousy,

though she reasoned with herself, trying to dismiss it.

"I know nothing, and I don't even love him. Then what right have I to be jealous?"

But the argument brought no conviction, for the feeling in her mind was not the normal kind of jealousy. It was a jealousy less of her rival whoever she might be, than of her husband. She envied him the possession of emotions that had never come to her. She wondered what it was that was wanting in her nature, and whether that want would ever be supplied, and she would ever really feel the tempestuous passion that sweeps people off their feet. For her one conception of love, now that she had come to think about it, was of something tempestuous and overwhelming. The love that gives rest instead of causing riot would only have excited her suspicions; she would not have believed it to be the genuine thing. And yet, with all her desire to plumb the depths of passion, her elementary intuition of a woman's duty never left her. Though she had been a docile listener to Mrs. Belbrooke's cynical criticisms of life, and had heard Marcus Brande's passionate declaration, and knew in her heart that Duncan Deane was ready to make a declaration just as passionate, if ever she encouraged him sufficiently, it was always her

husband whom she would have liked to love in that tumultuous fashion.

Meanwhile she was resolved to probe her husband's heart and learn his secret; for that there was some secret that he kept from her she was convinced.

She had another reason, besides the inferences which she had drawn from Mr. Duncan Deane's and Mrs. Belbrooke's talk, for her conviction. That reason was that she and Walter now always slept in separate rooms.

She had thought nothing of it—and certainly she had suspected nothing—when the arrangement first was made. In fact the change had been as much of her making as his. She liked sitting up late at night to work, and when she came to bed her brain would often be still full of the fancies she was shaping for her book, and she would want to lie awake restlessly, and think of them. So, noticing that this disturbed her husband, and that he grumbled, albeit not ill-humouredly, she said to him one day:

"Don't you think it would be better, Walter, just while we 're both so busy, if you had a bed made up for you in the spare room?"

And he had acquiesced, without either reluctance or undue alacrity, saying:

"Just as you like, Eleanor. Perhaps it would prevent us from keeping each other awake."

That was how it began,—as an arrangement for their mutual convenience, an experimental treatment of insomnia. It continued because Eleanor got neuralgia, for which she doctored herself with morphine, and she did not want Walter to know about the morphine. After she had recovered and given up the morphine, the arrangement still continued because it had become a habit, and Walter did not propose to change it.

This had not troubled Eleanor as it would have troubled many women; her mind was far too full of other thoughts to be disturbed by it. But it began to trouble her now that she was waking from her artistic trance, and looking the facts of life, as she understood them, in the face. For she had only to apply the law of cause and effect in order to infer a reason for it.

"When a man is in love with some other woman," she said to herself, "I suppose he feels his most sacred feelings outraged every time his own wife—"

So she argued, putting the point in its most brutal form, and, pursuing her quest, gradually got light upon it,—and that without even blundering into groundless and ridiculous suspicions of the unsuspecting or the innocent.

It did not occur to her, for instance, to be suspicious of her husband's relations with his models. He had, indeed, always been most careful not to give her cause. Except when figure models posed, she always had free access to the studio ; and she had noticed that he was not affable and familiar with models, as some artists are, but always treated them with distant and formal politeness, much as the manager of an insurance office might treat the lady clerks who took their orders from him.

So Eleanor never suspected Walter's models. Nor did she watch his correspondence, being satisfied that married men always receive their love letters at their Clubs. But one day she made a discovery quite by accident. She was turning out a drawer in his bedroom, and came upon a scarf-pin—a tiny "*W*" set in corals—which she had never seen him wear.

" She did not know—what Mr. Duncan Deane could have told her—that, when a woman wants to give a man a present, she is more likely to give a scarf-pin than any other present. Still, she felt an instinctive suspicion of the scarf-pin, and questioned Walter about it, asking him where he had got it.

" I 've always had it, my dear," he replied evasively.

" But you never wear it," she protested.

" I 've got so many," he said, " I can't possibly wear them all."

That certainly was true enough ; but she wondered whether it was not the pricking of his conscience that had always hindered him from wearing that particular scarf-pin in her presence. Still she refrained from questioning him further, as there was no means of testing the truth of his replies.

So far, then, her quest had taught her little ; but, continuing it, she came, a little later, on a photograph which, she judged, was not intended for her eyes. For, as a rule, Walter kept his photographs in frames, or in an album, and told her all about them ; but this photograph, like the scarf-pin, was buried obscurely in a drawer. She took it up and scanned it critically.

It was a pretty portrait,—the portrait of a girl whom she judged to be of about the same age as herself. The hair and eyes seemed to be dark ; the mouth was sensuous,—which is not quite the same thing as sensual ; the low-cut bodice showed that the throat was rich and full. Something in the pose of the head suggested that it was the portrait of an actress. And yet the expression of the face had a simplicity that contrasted strangely with the affectation of the pose.

But Eleanor was in no mood to judge kindly of the face.

"An actress, and not quite a lady," was her comment as she put the picture back in the place where she had found it.

Then a second thought came to her,—the fancy that she had seen the face before; and she pulled it out to look at it again.

No, she was not deceived. The face was familiar to her. Walter had painted it, in a single figure study called "l'Allegro," which he had ready for the next Academy Exhibition. The pose was different, of course—artists and photographers could hardly be expected to pose their subjects similarly—but the face was certainly the same. And, just as certainly, it was not the face of any model whom she had ever seen inside the studio.

Walter was out. So Eleanor went down into the studio, and, carefully comparing the photograph with the picture, assured herself of their identity.

She drew back the curtain that hung in front of the painting, hiding it, and turned the easel to the light. In spite of herself, its surpassing beauty moved her as it had never moved her when she had looked at it before. The face in the photograph she had thought vulgar and almost commonplace, in spite of its superficial prettiness; but

here was the same face transformed so that it expressed, in the laughter of the eyes and the curve of the half-opened lips, all the triumphant joy and gladness of a life that has known suffering only to conquer it, and having conquered, to defy it.

Eleanor stood before the picture in a rapt admiration that she could not withstand ; and as she gazed, there came back to her memory a sentence she had once spoken in the days when she was first trying to understand pictures and criticise them.

It was in the National Gallery, and she had been trying to find words that should express the exact difference between the genius of the three great English portrait-painters of the Georgian era.

"Sir Joshua," she had said, "paints women as if he understood them, Gainsborough as if he pitied them, Romney as if he were in love with them."

It was, of course, Romney's wonderful portraits of Lady Hamilton that had inspired the thought ; the rest was not thought at all but phrase-making.

But this painting of her husband's reminded her of the best and most delicate of Romney's work. It gave her the same subtle impression of tender reverential sentiment underlying the craftsman's cunning of technique. She felt again, in Walter's

studio, what she had felt before in the National Gallery—that it was impossible for a man to paint like that, unless he loved the woman whom he painted.

She fought against the feeling, telling herself that it was nonsense.

"It is too absurd," she said, "to let one's own foolish phrases impose on one like this."

Yet she could not help but glance from this portrait to another,—a portrait of herself that had hung, a year since, in one of the Suffolk Street exhibitions.

It was a striking likeness,—a likeness of which she would have had no title to complain if she had been an ordinary sitter, and had had to pay for it. It showed her, as she liked to think she looked, with a vague earnestness in her violet eyes, and the lustre, as of an aureole, upon her auburn hair. And yet, when she compared it with the other picture, there was something wanting in it,—something that the art critic would have passed unnoticed, though it was clear enough to her. It was, in short, as though, in the one picture, the artist had thought only of his art, while in the other, he had thought only of the woman.

So she knew that her quest was over, and that she had probed her husband's secret.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, "they were quite right when they told me that no man is passionless."

And then she pushed the easel to its place, and drew back the curtain over the picture.

CHAPTER IX.

A REVELATION.

THERE is a sort of evidence—perhaps the most conclusive sort—which is of no use for juries because it means nothing to an unimaginative mind ; and Eleanor had no other kind of evidence to show that the reason why her husband did not love her was that he loved this other woman whose likeness he had painted.

Yet she was sure of it ; and the peculiar fascination of the picture seemed to her to prove more than would have been proved even if she had seen her husband kiss the woman. For kissing, she would have argued, may happen almost by accident, and be regretted as soon as it is over ; while the artist's picture is the inevitable expression of his holiest, most secret self.

With this in her mind, she questioned Walter about the picture, though she knew that, at the best, he would tell her a part only of the truth.

And so, in fact, it happened.

"It 's worked up," he said, "from some old studies that I made years ago."

Then he added, looking at it affectionately:

"I think it 's turned out rather well, don't you? The eyes gave me a lot of trouble, but I 've pleased myself for once."

"Yes, it is a good picture," Eleanor answered, though with a disappointing absence of enthusiasm, continuing after a moment's silence:

"By the way, if it would n't trouble you too much, I 'd rather like to see those studies."

Walter lifted a cushion so as to get access to a locker, and after a few minutes' search discovered them.

There were some half-dozen pencil drawings and a photograph. They showed the same face as that in the painting,—only younger; and the drawings gave Eleanor the same unaccountable impression that the draughtsman must have been in love with his sitter, while the photograph recalled her comment on that other photograph which she had found,—that the woman was "an actress and not quite a lady."

She went on with her questions.

"It is a pretty face," she said, and Walter nodded.

"You must have seen more in her than other

people did," she added, holding up the portrait in one hand, and one of the sketches in the other.

"Of course, of course," he answered. "Unless one can do that, one has no right to paint a portrait."

"It looks to me,"—she could not keep herself from saying this—"as though you must also have been fonder of her than other people were."

He forced a smile.

"It is a very long time since I made the sketches," he replied evasively.

She fired her other shaft.

"And yet, if one may judge by the photograph," she said, "she must have been almost a common girl."

Walter was angry, but he only said :

"Surely, Eleanor, it would be a better compliment to me if you formed your opinion from the drawings."

As an artist, she felt that it was a fair retort ; but, as a woman, she was not satisfied with it.

"If one judged Mr. Shannon's sitters by his portraits," she replied, "one would conclude that they were all duchesses, whereas we know that, as a rule, they are nothing of the kind. So I prefer to judge from the photograph, and from that it is evident that the girl is quite a common girl."

Not knowing what it was that was passing in his wife's mind, Walter was puzzled by this strange persistence. Surely she knew that all models were common girls. Why then this sudden sneering at their social status, as though social status were a moral quality? He answered, rather sharply,

"Really, Eleanor, I don't understand the point of view which refuses to regard a woman as a human being unless her father and mother are in society. Suppose this girl was a common girl, what on earth does it matter to anyone but herself?"

"Nothing, nothing," Eleanor said; for she was conscious of a rude justice in the retort that would have given him the advantage if she had argued.

So the conversation ended without leading up to any sort of explanation, but only deepening Eleanor's perplexity, leaving her to puzzle her way as best she might through another of the baffling mysteries of human nature.

For she had now rescued her way to the conclusion that her husband loved a woman who was socially beneath him, and she tried in vain to understand how such a thing could be. To her, as to most women, the lower classes were rather less interesting than the lower animals. That men of refinement could be attracted by them while there

were ladies in the world was a thing that passed her comprehension.

What a pity, then, that Walter should throw his love away upon a woman who was "not quite a lady!" She caught the thought passing through her mind, and perhaps, at that moment, was nearer to loving him herself than she had ever been before. For now there was jealousy to influence her thoughts; and from jealousy to love the path is short, unless the obstacle of open humiliation bars the way.

As yet, however, Eleanor's jealousy was hardly the predominant factor in her thoughts; and this mystery of a man's preference for a woman who was his inferior to women who were his equals was the thing that chiefly occupied her.

She spoke of it, when the chance showed itself, to Mrs. Belbrooke.

It was the case of Mr. Pyne that gave the opening. When Mr. Pyne had talked sentimentally in the studio of his model's womanly charms, neither Eleanor nor anyone else had supposed him to be serious; but one morning he surprised and shocked his friends by marrying her at the Chelsea Registry Office.

"I never can believe a story of that sort," Eleanor said, "until I actually know it to be true. It's

like those dreadful stories one hears of women eloping with their grooms."

"But those stories are true too, sometimes," Mrs. Belbrooke answered.

"I know, I know. But they seem so horribly abnormal and unnatural. What can be the attraction that men see in these dreadful women?"

But Mrs. Belbrooke could throw very little light upon the subject.

"It's a man's question," she said, "and you'd better get a man to answer it. So far as I can see the prettiest of us are just as pretty as these women, and the best of us are just as good, and the wickedest are just as wicked."

"And we certainly dress better," Eleanor interjected; "these women are only safe in black; they always make mistakes with colours."

"That's true. And when one's mentioned dress, and looks, and morals, there's nothing left but manners,—is there?"

"No, and with these women very often not even that, I fancy," Eleanor said disdainfully.

And Mrs. Belbrooke agreed with her, and they had to leave the problem without getting within sight of its solution.

However the young painter's marriage was much discussed in Kensington, and most of his friends

had their say upon the power of love to level ranks.

Even in the studio, one Sunday evening when a few friends had called, the talk turned upon the theme, and Walter himself joined in it without visible embarrassment. It was Mrs. Belbrooke who appealed to him.

"We want your help, Mr. Temple," she said. "As I tell Mrs. Temple, it is a man's problem, and we poor women are powerless before it. What is the reason why men marry common girls?"

"They don't do it very often, Mrs. Belbrooke," Walter protested.

"You mean to say that they only do it when they can't see their way to behave dishonourably?"

The Reverend Paul Devine looked shocked, and Walter hastened to protest again.

"You put the words into my mouth, Mrs. Belbrooke, I did not use them."

"No? Well, no matter. That 's only a side issue in any case. What I meant to ask you was: why do men fall in love with common girls? What is the attraction? Don't men like their women to be lady-like?"

"You 're not referring to very young men, I imagine, Mrs. Belbrooke?"

"Certainly not. I 'm quite aware that it would

be idle to try to account for any very young man's vagaries. I refer to men who are old enough to discriminate, like our friend. Don't they prefer their women-kind to be lady-like ?"

Walter hesitated, as though he wished to think before he spoke.

"I could fancy such a man saying," he answered, "that to be lady-like was well, but that to be womanly was better."

"Yes, and rarer," echoed Duncan Deane, with emphasis.

Then Eleanor felt herself provoked to sarcasm, as the best of women will when the uses of social status are disparaged in their hearing, and shot a barbed shaft into the conversation.

"You might descend to details, Walter," she said. "For example, one knows that it is n't lady-like to eat peas with a knife. But would you call it womanly?"

But Walter was not confounded by the question.

"I don't believe women ever do it," he replied, "not when they 're in love. Love is a great teacher, and though it might not teach what you call a common girl the intricate etiquette of leaving cards, I think it could hardly fail to teach her the simpler etiquette of eating peas."

Eleanor looked scornfully incredulous, and tried

to recall an instance to the contrary. Mr. Devine saw what she wanted, and had half a mind to prompt her with an anecdote concerning the wife of a bishop who had married beneath him; but before he could do so, Duncan Deane took charge of the conversation.

"That 's true," he said, "the question is n't one of manners but of humanity."

"Humanity, Mr. Deane!"

The astonished exclamation came from both the ladies simultaneously.

"I will explain myself," Mr. Deane proceeded. "When such a man as Pyne—such a man as any of ourselves—falls really in love with, let us say, a model, or a dancing girl, you may be quite sure that there is n't much amiss with her manners. Nice manners come to a nice girl by nature——"

"Nice manners perhaps, but not correct manners, Mr. Deane," Mrs. Belbrooke interposed.

"No, not correct manners. But, mark you, what you call correct manners count for nothing until the woman deliberately stands up to be judged by the artificial standard of conventions which she has never learnt. Then, I grant you, they may count for much, may give husbands blue shivers, and make marriages unhappy, because you other women who have set that artificial standard exalt

it rather higher than the Ten Commandments, and punish the most trivial breach of it accordingly. But you must remember that it is an artificial standard all the same. It may make a man, if he is a weak man, think twice before marrying the model or dancing girl ; but it will hardly hinder him from falling in love with her."

Mrs. Belbrooke raised a protest.

"You confine yourself to negative arguments, Mr. Deane," she said. "What Mrs. Temple and I want to know is : What are the positive attractions of the model or the dancing girl ?"

"Much the same, I should imagine, Mrs. Belbrooke," Mr. Deane replied, "as the positive attractions of any other attractive woman. That is to say, in the one case as in the other, it is the individual that attracts, and not the class. Only the model and the dancing girl—to take these as types—have one great advantage over the women who look down upon them. They are more natural, more genuine, more sincere."

"You mean more ready, as the slang phrase is, to give themselves away," interpolated Mrs. Belbrooke.

"Put it in that way if you like ; but the expression will still need to be defined. What I mean is that such a girl as we are talking of can strip off

her artificialities more easily than you can. When she meets a man belonging to a higher circle than her own, it is under circumstances which remove both of them, as far as possible, from the social artificialities of their ordinary lives. There is less need for reserve because there are no critics present to remark upon its absence. There is more romance because there is no danger of chaff, as congratulations, or any of the other horrors that make ordinary love-affairs so prosaic. And therefore the better self of each shows itself more readily from behind the mask, and the two souls, seeing each other face to face, rejoice at finding unsuspected sympathies and make haste to build up a fabric of other sympathies on their foundation."

It pleased Mrs. Belbrooke to read a personal meaning into this long harangue.

"She must have been an awfully nice girl, Mr. Deane," she said. "It 's a pity—is n't it?—that these romances so often break off abruptly in the middle of the second volume."

And then she added, fancying that he blushed,

"But surely your eloquent words about the subtle sympathies that kindred souls discover apply to other love-affairs besides those with dancing girls and models."

And Mr. Duncan Deane admitted with qualifications, that they did.

"Yes, yes," he said, "of course, wherever there is love, the reserve goes, and the human nature triumphs and asserts itself. But, with the model and the dancing girl, the human nature lies nearer to the surface, and they are not so cautious and timid of revealing it. It is greater victory, you will tell me, to break down the barriers that hide the real self of the woman whose secret soul is covered and crushed by the artificial conventions of the society in which she moves. So it is, and it may be that sometimes the reward is also greater. But the human nature of the model or the dancing girl is, in its essence, every bit the same as the human nature that is in you or any of your friends; and that is why I tell you that, if he meet her, as he is almost sure to, in a little world to which your censorious and artificial standards cannot penetrate, a man may fall in love with a model or a dancing girl as easily as with any other woman."

That practically ended the conversation. For Mrs. Belbrooke's repetition of her personal remark, "She must really have been a very charming girl, Mr. Deane," was scarcely a serious contribubution to it; and the talk that followed dealt not with general propositions but with the particular

attractions of the particular model whom Mr. Pyne had just taken to Veules-en-Caux for the honeymoon.

But the talk had a lesson for Eleanor, which she studied afterwards at her leisure. It seemed to her that, having listened to it, she understood better than before what it meant to be in love; and she recalled some lines of Browning's that appeared to have a bearing on the matter:

> "*Thanks be to God, the meanest of his creatures*
> *Has got two soul-sides, one to face the world with,*
> *And one to show a woman when he loves her.*"

She dwelt long and often on the passage, reading into it the sense that her own spiritual experiences suggested. It was as true, she told herself, of women as of men; and the truth was that love meant, just as Mr. Duncan Deane had said, the breaking down of those mysterious barriers which every human soul builds round itself and cannot escape from without another human soul to help it. Love might, indeed, mean other things as well; but this was the first and chief thing that it meant.

Then, with the novel sense of jealousy for an unknown rival helping her, she wondered what Walter's real and true self was like when he revealed it to a woman whom he loved.

"He's never shown himself to me," she murmured, "never, except as he shows himself to all the world."

And yet she was sure that somewhere in his being, as in hers, there was another, a different, and a deeper self that could be found by anyone who knew the way to search for it. The thought tormented her that some other woman—and, as it seemed, some "common" woman—should have found that way, while she herself should have lived five years with her husband, and yet have failed to find it.

For the thought never crossed her mind that she would find him unlovable if the secret of his real self were disclosed to her, or that his passion for this unknown girl of low degree betokened any answering vulgarity or unworthiness in him. She contrasted him with those of the men she knew who had aspired to be her lovers, and her heart told her that he was worthier of her love than any of them. She was sure that it would be an honour to be in love with him, and infinite happiness to have her love returned.

Then, as she dwelt upon the thought, and came back to it day after day, and built up for herself some ideal picture of that real self which she believed in so profoundly, though she knew not

how to tear her way through the veil that hid it from her, a further thought began to spring up in her mind. It stole upon her insensibly at first, but grew and grew until it gathered irresistible and convincing strength.

"I do believe," she murmured to herself, "I do believe I actually am in love with him."

And then she added, with a sudden sense of passion which assured her that she had not deceived herself:

"Yes, yes, I know it. I am sure of it. If only he would begin. If only he would take me in his arms now, and kiss me as if his soul were in the kiss, and let me cling to him, then the scales would fall from both our eyes, and we should love each other."

But the days passed on, one after the other, in wearisome monotony, and the thing that Eleanor so passionately longed for did not happen, and Walter never even guessed that she felt differently towards him than on that afternoon when they had sat together in the little room beside the studio, and had lamented that they only liked each other.

CHAPTER X.

SOUL BARRIERS.

THE days passed, and nothing happened except that Eleanor went on thinking.

Her interest in her uncompleted book was gone; her own life was the only thing that had any interest for her now. For the sake, not of her art but of her happiness, she sought to know the nature of that subtle force that melts the barriers between two human souls, and lets them love each other.

For she was quite sure that she was in love with Walter now. She could not, indeed, have fixed on any definite moment of time, and declared that it was then that the certainty began. Yet the power of jealousy had worked upon her so that the certainty was there, and the new passion was gathering force from day to day. She loved him, though she had only imagined, and never actually known his real self; and she was assured that, if only she could teach him to know that real passionate self of hers which she had hidden from him for so long,

then he would love her with a passion answering and equalling her own.

But were they ever melted or pierced except by accident,—these mysterious invisible barriers that separated soul from soul?

She wondered, and her wonder gave her an interest which she would not otherwise have had in a certain story which Duncan Deane told her he had imagined and proposed to write. For it was a frequent habit of Duncan Deane's to tell his stories to his friends as fast as he imagined them, in order to judge of their effect, and if it might be to gather hints for their perfections.

It was at Stornoway's; and for once they were in a protected corner seat where it seemed improbable that anyone would be brought over to be introduced.

"It is a story that was suggested to me," Duncan Deane began, "by that long discussion in the studio the other night. We were talking, you remember, about love, and saying how sometimes it is so easy and sometimes so hard for two human souls to strip themselves of their artificialities, and see each other face to face in that perfect sympathy which is what love really means."

"That might be the starting point of many stories, Mr. Deane," she said.

"No doubt," he answered. "But, for the mo-

ment, I see in it only one story that is supremely true,—true, that is to say, not because I know that it has ever happened but because I feel that it is bound to happen."

For once Eleanor was curious about another writer's story.

"Tell me the story, Mr. Deane," she said.

"I imagine," he went on, "a man and a woman meeting in a crowd,—meeting, one may suppose, in just such a gathering as this Strangers to each other, they feel themselves drawn mysteriously together by the bonds of a subtle sympathy. It is not at all the sympathy of a dawning love, but only the sympathy of a common pain. For they have both suffered, and are suffering still ; some love-trouble—no matter what—has made shipwreck of both their lives. So they move through the midst of this clatter and gaiety with the terrible sense that it is hollow and has no meaning for them. They alone, in all the merry crowd, are solitary and heart-sore ; and somehow, as I have said, they find each other."

"Stornoway would naturally tell them that they ought to know each other."

Eleanor could not resist the interruption ; but Mr. Duncan Deane, went on, only acknowledging it with a passing smile.

"They find each other, and they talk together. They find too, when they have finished the first skirmish with trivialities, that it pleases them both best to talk about themselves. Sitting together in a corner, just as we are sitting now, they tell each other the stories of their lives. They do not, of course, tell each other everything. One never, I think, tells everything in a confession of this kind; there is always something in one's life so sacred that one keeps it to oneself even in one's most expansive moods. So they leave things out, and perhaps even put in other things to fill the blanks; and yet, in the main, they have each other's confidences, and understand each other. Thus understanding each other they can talk freely—quite differently from the other people who are prattling all around them about plays, and books, and pictures, and literary scandals, and holiday resorts."

"That should be difficult dialogue to write, Mr. Deane," Eleanor interposed.

"Perhaps. And yet not so hard as it seems, when you have got the situations well imagined in your mind. Think of it now; make yourself a picture of it, and you will see just what it is that this man and this woman have to say to one another. Cannot you see them telling one another, shyly at first, and then with mutual encouragement

more boldly, that life without love is absolutely worthless to those who have once learnt what it is to crave for love? Cannot you picture them telling one another that whoever might be dead or lost to them, the whole world would change its colour for them, and happiness would spring up for them out of the ashes of their misery, if only by some means or other they could bring passion back into their lives again?"

He looked into her eyes, wondering whether she drew from his story any meaning that bore upon his case and hers. But Eleanor was not thinking of Duncan Deane at all, but only of his imaginary characters.

"Yes, yes," she said. "And then?"

"And then," he repeated, and went on in the tone of assured conviction, as though he merely drew a conclusion in geometry, or logic:

"Would they not naturally wonder whether, as they both pined for love, and did not care to live without it, each could not give the other what the other needed? I think so. And I picture them telling each other that they are the two lonely souls in that glad and laughing crowd to whom the gladness and the laughter seem a mockery and an affront. I imagine them joining hands in the midst of the insolent merriment, and making a

solemn compact with each other,—a compact that they would throw their pasts behind them, and as they both needed love would love each other, and so defy their fate, and bring back into their lives that passion without which life was nothing but a lonely wandering through an unpeopled wilderness."

"And then, Mr. Deane?" Eleanor repeated.

He gazed again into her eyes, thinking of her and of himself, and still hoping to read there something that should give him a reason to end his story happily. But she did not even divine the meaning of his searching look; and he saw this, and after a pause, dropped his eyes, and gave her the unhappy ending.

"They try, and fail," he said. "In my mind's eye, I can see the last scene where, with tears in their voices they confess the failure. They are taking their last walk together. It is on some lonely beach beside the sea, when the wind is stilled, and the ripples roll up their creamy foam, and the smiling sun throws a crimson glory from horizon to the shore, and everything in nature seems to bid love welcome. They pace sadly to and fro upon the sands, and the thought that is uppermost in both their hearts is that they are still strangers to each other, just as they were upon

the day when they first met and made their compact. Then, as they walk there, the sun goes down behind the waves, and he for 'form's' sake gives her a last kiss in the deepening twilight; and she returns his kiss as calmly, and lets him take her hand, but murmurs: 'No, No, it is n't real, it is n't real.' And then they part, and go upon their separate lonely ways in life, knowing that the human will alone cannot suffice to break those barriers between soul and soul which must be broken before love can be attained."

His voice fell to a pathetic whisper and his eyes shone like the eyes of a visionary as he recited the last words. It was as though the triumphant artist in him had subdued and comforted the defeated lover. For his artistic imaginings had a strange power over him; it was his strongest proof that art was a disease. But the artist gave way again to the lover when Eleanor questioned him simply, like a poor ignorant patient consulting a skilled physician of the soul.

"Then, do all the true stories end unhappily, Mr. Deane?" she asked. "And must there always be some outside power—some miracle, as it were—to level those barriers between soul and soul? And can we never break through them of our own free will because we know them to be

obstacles that hinder us, or defeat us when we are trying to be happy?"

This time he looked at her steadily, wondering whether he might dare put out his hand, and take hold of hers under the screening protection of her fan. But the look frightened her, and she lifted the fan, and baffled an attempt that she was unaware of, and so, without knowing it determined the answer he should give her.

"It seems not," he said, "the laws of nature are cruel laws, and there are no exceptions to them."

To which Eleanor replied, in the spirit not of an artist but of an indignant woman:

"I don't believe you, Mr. Deane. I believe you write your stories first and make up the incidents of life to fit them afterwards."

And the retort which Mr. Deane had ready was frustrated by the arrival of Stornoway, pushing aside the chairs and tables by which their position was entrenched, and murmuring confidentially:

"Mrs. Temple, I want you to let me introduce Mr. Rupert Desborough, the great Anglo-Parisian journalist. A most distinguished man. Fought seventeen duels in three years. You ought to get him to tell you all about them. They 'll make splendid 'copy.'"

So Mr. Duncan Deane was chased away from

the ottoman, and presented to a burlesque actress who told him the whole history of her performances in tights and trunks; repeating her "notices" from memory, while Eleanor remained to converse with Mr. Rupert Desborough, who had nothing whatever to say about his duels, but preferred to plead the cause of a certain notorious murderer, who had been sentenced, that afternoon, on what he considered insufficient evidence, to be hanged by the neck till he was dead. He had written a letter about it to the *Telegraph*, he said. Would n't Mrs. Temple write one too? It made no difference that she had n't followed the case, because he could easily tell her what to say. And so the evening passed.

It left Eleanor, however, with one thought firmly fastened in her mind—the thought that she had suddenly struck out in contradiction to Mr. Duncan Deane's dogmatic theories of life. What right had he, she asked herself, to lay down that this or that was the unalterable law of nature, and that human life and human love are determined by a blind chance that human action cannot influence or control? The thought of such an impotence revolted her. What use was there, if that were so, in being a human being instead of a brute beast?

That was the abstract thought, and she was not

going to be afraid to put it to the concrete test. Indeed, she told herself, her theory had undergone half its concrete test already. She had wanted to love her husband ; and now she loved him so well that to win his love in answer was the one thing in life that mattered to her. And she would win it ! For between her and it there stood only this one woman—a beautiful woman, it might be, but not more beautiful than she was—a loving woman, perhaps, but not more loving than she could be now that she had learnt how to love—a woman, for the rest, her inferior in every attribute admired and respected in the world her husband lived in—a woman, in short, who " was not quite a lady."

Was a woman of that sort to be a rival worth reckoning now that she was resolved to wrest the prize from her ? She laughed at the idea, the light disdainful laugh of the coquette who arms for conquest.

There came a memory of that long evening's talk in the studio, and a still, small, warning voice seemed to whisper in her ear :

" Ah ! but that woman has some secret that you have not learnt. You may be sure of it, for otherwise your husband would love you instead of her. For all her vulgarity, for all her ignorance, she knows some secret that you have never learnt."

But pride tossed the whispered suggestion to the winds and found an answer to it.

"She will have no secret that I cannot learn," was the retort pride prompted ; and behind it was the further thought that things were likely to go hardly with that other woman from the day when Eleanor began to know her secret.

Such was the course in which her meditations ran. But how to act ? On that point, too, she speedily made up her mind.

Since Walter was reticent, and likely to be the more reticent the more she questioned him, then someone else must tell her the thing she was resolved to know.

But whom to ask ? That question also, by a process of exhaustion, soon resolved itself.

It was only a man, she was convinced, who was likely to know enough to help her ; and of all the men she knew there was only one on whom she felt she could depend. For she would have scorned to seek the help of Marcus Brande, though she was assured that he would be glad to tell her everything ; and she was confident that Mr. Devine would be ignorant of everything, and that Captain Armitage would rather lie to her than make what he imagined to be mischief. Therefore, she must need fall back on Mr. Duncan Deane. And even

to him she offered no confidences or confessions in return for the information she desired.

Keeping the photograph always ready to her hand, she produced it when next she was alone with him. But first she said :

"I wonder, Mr. Deane, if you would promise to do me a favour without knowing what it is."

He promised. She might command him, he said, in tones which implied that he would be glad even to suffer agonising martyrdom, for her.

She could not help smiling a little at his overwhelming earnestness, as she continued :

"It is something very simple, Mr. Deane. I only want you to answer one question truthfully. Whose photograph is this ?"

She handed it to him, and then sat back in her armchair watching him, as he stood by the window and held it to the light. From his changing expression she gathered first that he knew the face, and then that he wanted to feign ignorance. Observing it, she stamped her foot impatiently.

"You promised, Mr. Deane," she said. "You are not going to break your promise ?"

He still hesitated for a moment, and even paced, once or twice, across the room. Then he gave the portrait back to her.

"You insist, Mrs. Temple ?"

"Of course I insist, Mr. Deane. I have a right to know."

Then he told her.

"The name," he said, "is Dora Ffrench."

Eleanor tried to speak carelessly.

"Dora is a pretty name," she said, "who is she? Is she a lady?"

"That depends, Mrs. Temple," he replied.

"That depends, Mr. Deane? And pray, on what does it depend?"

"I don't know; but some people might say that it depends on where you meet her?"

"And where do you meet her?" Eleanor continued; and Mr. Deane replied:

"Well, she belongs to Shaftesbury Avenue, but I believe she is sometimes to be found in Harley Street."

That was surprising. "A common girl who was sometimes to be found in Harley Street"; but Eleanor veiled her astonishment, and added:

"I have a fancy to meet her,—in Harley Street, of course. What houses does she go to?"

"Only to Lady Brent's, I think."

Eleanor reflected.

"To Lady Brent's?" she repeated. "That means, I imagine, that she amuses Lady Brent's guests for nothing. How?"

"By skirt dancing," Mr. Duncan Deane replied.

"Thank you!"

And then Eleanor changed the subject, asking Mr. Deane how he was getting on with his short stories; and pretended to be interested in publishers, and syndicates, and American serial rights.

CHAPTER XI.

DRIFTING.

SO Eleanor was resolved to learn the truth about this other woman,—this common girl, who "was sometimes to be found in Harley Street."

To learn the truth? Yet it was only a portion of the truth that it was possible for her to learn. The details of the story were things that she could never know without the gift of second sight, though it might well be that, if some such mysterious hypnotic vision could have shown her only three scenes in Walter's life, she could have thought out the rest of the riddle easily enough.

The first scene of all was a farewell scene in Walter's studio,—the shabby little studio that he used to live in in the old days before he was beginning to make money.

It was a grim room, newly whitewashed, with a glass roof not always impervious to rain. For furniture there was little besides an easel, a chipped

table without a table-cloth, and a few rush-bottomed chairs. In place of a carpet, there were only one or two worn and insufficient mats. There was no bookcase, but a few books were piled on either side of a beer-barrel in a corner of the room. The cups and saucers, and the tumblers were not hidden away decorously in a cupboard, but rested on a bare and open shelf of deal. A few oil paintings, unframed for the most part, strewn about at hazard, accentuated rather than relieved the general barrenness ; and the model's throne was the only place where it was possible to sit with comfort. And, in this artistic wilderness, the boy artist, and the common girl, his model, said good-bye.

It was a good-bye devoid of sentiment,—devoid, at all events, of any outward show of sentiment. Whatever thoughts the girl's mind might be harbouring, Walter's was quite free from any clouds of gloom.

"It was very nice of you to come and say good-bye to me before you went," he said ; and then they talked unsentimentally of various things,—of other artists, and other models,—what they were doing, what they were about to do.

Particularly they talked about the future,—about the new life that she had chosen. She was not to

be an artist's model any longer, but was going on the stage. She had learnt singing and dancing, as these arts are taught in the Waterloo Bridge Road, and now she had been engaged to join some travelling operatic company that was going round the world. The train would leave Waterloo for Southhampton the next evening. She wondered whether she would be a good sailor, and asked ignorant questions about Africa and the Sandwich Islands, and the Atlantic Ocean. Was stout good for seasickness? And would savages come to the theatre in paint and feathers? And would cannibal princes be likely to send bouquets round to the stage door?

That was their talk,—quite cheerful talk—with no more sentiment in it than is inevitable whenever old friends are forced to separate. For she was almost the only model who ever sat to him, and though he used to make her work hard, and tire her with protracted poses, he felt a friendship for her, so that he was very sorry that she was going.

He said so now.

"I 'm glad of that," she answered. "And I 'm sorry too. I daresay I 'm sorrier than you are. But there, it has to be. It 's a chance, you see, and one must n't throw away one's chances."

"No, no, Dora," he agreed, "one must n't throw

away one's chances. One does n't get enough of them for that. Be sure you look me up when you come back again."

"But you 'll be a great man, then, and too proud to know me," she protested.

He laughed, and said he wished he was as sure of being great as he was of not being proud; and she thanked him for having always been very kind to her, and reminded him of a certain night when he had taken her to the Earls Court Exhibition, and the talk threatened to be sentimental.

But the hour was getting late. She had packing to finish, and it was time for her to go.

He took her hand, and seemed to hesitate. For he was not at all in love with her. So she spoke first.

"Yes, I 'm sorry to go,—sorrier than you are. And—and—you may kiss me if you like."

It was unmaidenly, of course, but then she was only a common girl, and no one had ever taught her to be maidenly. He put his arms round her and kissed her.

"Good-bye, Dora," he said.

"Good-bye," she answered; he fancied that he heard something like a sob in her voice.

Then he went out with her, and put her in a cab, and all that night the common girl sobbed her

heart out on her pillow; and the boy artist went back to his studio, and sat in front of his stove, with his hands upon his knees, staring at the blackening embers, and meditating.

"I do believe that girl is in love with me," he murmured,—and feeling lonely, fancied, for an hour or two, that he also was in love with her, though he knew better when the morning came.

That was the first scene, and it was not in the nature of things that Eleanor, by taking thought, should ever be able to know anything about it. Even if she had known all about it, there was nothing in it that need have hindered her from marrying. For there was no amour,—only a sentiment that lasted for an hour or two; and even if there had been an amour, she might easily have argued with herself that amours with common girls were of no consequence and left no abiding traces on the heart. So that the first scene matters only because it was the prelude of the others.

The second scene was later, after Walter was married to the wife who only liked him, and whom he only liked; and this time it was a scene not of parting but of meeting.

It happened on a day when Walter felt the restraints of his too civilised corner of Bohemia irksome, and its veneer and polish insolent.

It is a feeling that is apt to fall, from time to time, on any man who has the artistic temperament, and is condemned to dwell amid a constant babble of artistic small-talk. The air seems heavy and unhealthy where all the talk is of books and exhibitions. He must get away from art and artists and refresh his soul by contact with nature and the natural man, who lives and moves and has his being beyond earshot of the artistic shibboleths. For choice, he would like to climb the Alps, or float up the Norwegian Fiords, or paddle his canoe along untravelled continental waterways, or pitch his tent among the Arabs in the Algerian deserts ; and if this, for one reason or another cannot be, the self-same impulse will drive him, if only for a day or a night, to barbarous quarters of the town, where the shadow of the New English Art Club does not fall, and the voice of the Ibsenitish women is not heard, and the only artists much esteemed are those of the theatres and Music Halls. So he drifts from Romano's to the Cheshire Cheese, and rubs shoulders with men and women who are incapable of understanding him, and lounges in the promenades of Music Halls and eats a little supper, and hears a comic song at one night club, and meets pickpockets and prize-fighters at another,—and all this not for the love of vice or evil com-

pany, but because of his imperative need for moral change of air.

That, then, was the mood in which Walter Temple was coming down the Strand that afternoon,—his black slouch hat of soft felt stamping him as of Bohemia, his black Inverness cape floating picturesquely from his shoulders, his limp salmon-pink tie a pleasing point of colour in the thick November air—driven, as it were, by the over-mastering impulse to escape from culture and unbend. And, as he hurried by, passing the corner of Catherine Street, he felt the soft touch of a hand upon his elbow, and heard a soft voice call him by his name.

"Mr. Temple!"

"Dora! So it really is you?"

"Of course it is. Surely I have n't altered so tremendously. You have n't. Suppose we go in somewhere where we can sit down and talk."

That was the meeting—the merest hazard—a hazard too that might so easily have been of no importance. For at least on his side, there had been no sentimental memories of daily life to choke, no sentimental impression for the sudden encounter to revive. So that the meeting did not make his pulse beat quicker and it would have cost him no effort whatsoever to say good-bye again without even giving or asking an address. It was only that

Dora Ffrench was an old friend, and that it would be pleasant to talk about old times with her.

They sat opposite to each other in the café, asking the inevitable questions.

"What are you doing now? How have you been getting on?"

It did not shock Walter very much to find that Dora did not know what he had been doing or know how he had been getting on. For he knew quite well that no man's fame can travel far until he is caricatured in comic papers, and that little actresses from the provinces do not follow the movements in the other arts, and are likely to hear but little of the progress of a painter unless he contributes to the Christmas numbers, or designs advertisements for soap-boilers.

So Walter smiled at the question, and told her of the progress he was making, and she was frankly and sincerely glad. "I always knew you would be famous," she said; and this pleased him better than though she had spoken the art jargon fluently, and paid him the precise compliments which he felt that he deserved.

Then it was his turn to ask.

"And you, Dora? How have you been getting on? I think you have improved, you know."

It was spoken carelessly, as a compliment more

or less conventional, but it was truer than he knew. For the truth was that the stage life had done her good precisely because she was a common girl. If she had not been common it might have taught her to assume ungracious affectations; but as it was the stage had taught her manners, and particularly that branch of manners which is summed up in the French phrase, *se faire valoir*. For the actress, however humble are the parts she plays, has not the shop-girl's need to be always saying "sir" or "madam." Even people contemptuous of the histrionic calling must treat her as their equal if they speak with her at all, and so she learns to be comparatively at ease in Social Zions to which she was not born.

So Dora Ffrench, the dancing girl, was an improvement upon Dora Ffrench, the painter's model. Such little affectations as she had acquired sat lightly on her. The underlying nature was simple, gentle, confiding as it used to be; while the externals were more gracious than of old. She dressed more tastefully; her movements had a better self-possession; and, as a consequence it seemed that her eyes were brighter, her smile was more tempting, and her face was prettier than ever. And all this, which Walter had not noticed while they stood talking at the corner of the street, was

gradually borne in upon him while she sat facing him at the marble table in the café, and told him how things had gone with her since the evening of their parting in the dingy Chelsea studio.

It was a long story, rattled off garrulously and disconnectedly; a story of strange sights seen and humorous adventures met, now in the shires, now in the colonies, and now in the United States; a story of hard work relieved at times by unexpected gaieties, ephemeral flirtations, and scandals assailing the fair fame of the leading lady. There were humorous moments in it when supers demanded to appear as Guardsmen without shaving off their beards; there were merry moments when the champagne corks popped and the wine sparkled in the glass; there were melancholy moments when the treasury was empty and the ghost no longer walked.

It was as the result of one of these melancholy moments that Dora Ffrench was at that time in London, knocking at the agent's doors, in Wellington Street, in quest of work.

"The tour broke up at Johannesburg," she explained, "there 's been a kind of collapse. The mines had all gone wrong or something of the sort, and people declared that there was n't any money in the town. Anyhow none of it came into the theatre, though the drinking bars generally seemed

to be pretty full. It was empty house, empty house, every day for a fortnight; then it was the old, old stories. The first week it was "Girls, how little do you think you can do with?" Then it was "Girls, we 're awfully sorry. We 've done the best we can for you, and run the show at a loss as long as we could; but now there 's only eight and sixpence left in the treasury, and we can't possibly go on with the tour."

Then she went on to tell of what had happened after the collapse; how some of the chorus girls had stayed at Johannesburg as barmaids, and others had gone up country to be the informal wives of mining engineers who set no store by rites and ceremonies; how certain kind friends had "taken the hat round" to help the rest; and how, after hardship and vicissitude, she and some of the others had contrived to struggle home.

All the time that she spoke, talking of her troubles bravely and light-heartedly, as though they had been some other person's troubles, Walter felt the spell beginning to lay hold of him. She was so different from the Dora whom he had known in the old days,—so much brighter, so much more interesting,—so much readier to meet him upon equal terms. Perhaps too it counted for something that she was so much better dressed.

He did not struggle with the enchantment, as he might have done ; he did not even perceive how much its invasion of his life might mean. But for the thought that Dora might have pressing and immediate needs, he would hardly have looked beyond the present moment, satisfied with the unreflecting enjoyment of the passing hour.

That thought, however, was in its way a welcome thought. Was it not just, for old sake's sake, that he should do something to help Dora? And to help her must he not go on seeing her? And so, would he not have a sense of duty to sustain him if he lived a double life?

" After I 've paid the landlady, I suppose I shall have about five and twenty shillings left," she said in answer to his question.

" And when you 've spent that, Dora?"

She shrugged her shoulders and pointed to the rings on her fingers and the bracelets on her wrists,

" That 's worth about five pounds," she said, " if I don't get a shop in time."

A shop is the actor's term for an engagement.

Walter Temple smiled as he continued:

" And then there are the song and dance dresses, and the wigs, and the hats, and the shoes, and then, I suppose, there 's nothing."

"Nothing," she admitted. "But let 's hope it won't come to that. Gilbert Brown will be sure to get me something before then."

"Sure, Dora?"

This in the sceptical accent of one who had heard strange tales of the dealings of musical and dramatic agents with the weak and helpless.

"Well, he promised to try," she answered; and this time there was less conviction in her tones.

Walter sat silent for a minute, considering what form his offer to help her had better take.

"You 'll want money," he said. "I wonder if you 'd care to sit again."

"You mean sit to you?"

She asked the question with a little flutter of anticipation; for she had never schooled herself to make secrets of her emotions. Her obvious pleasure seemed an added reason why Walter should help her in this fashion rather than another.

"Of course I mean sit to me," he answered. "You need n't give up the stage, you know. There 's no reason why you should do that. In fact I 'll talk to one or two people and try to get you a town engagement if you like. But meanwhile you can be wonderfully useful to me if you won't mind posing for a picture I have in my mind

for next year's Academy. I don't know another model in London who would do for it as you would."

Humbug? In part, perhaps. And yet not altogether humbug, and certainly not conscious humbug. Needing a pretext, he took the truest that he could; and if it was true that the desire was growing on him to make sure of seeing this pretty dancing girl as often as he could, it was true also that he believed that he would paint his best when painting her. So true was it, indeed, that even while they sat there on the faded crimson cushions of the tawdry little restaurant, his manner brightened, and his speech got more vivacious, as he began to tell her what the picture was to be, talking wildly over her head about tone, and atmosphere, and colour contrast, and other things which brought back happy memories without conveying any very definite meaning to her mind.

And Dora listened to him, not critically, as Eleanor used to listen, without any of the helpful objections or suggestions that Eleanor might have offered, but with her imagination surrendered happily to his, and in the spirit and temper of a little child that listens to a fairy-tale, fascinated by the story, but indifferent whether it will be a moral allegory or a sun-myth.

That was the second scene that might have helped Eleanor understand, if any sudden power of second sight could have revealed it to her. Like the first, it was a scene that she could not know of, and was unlikely even to imagine. As for the third scene, that was a typical scene,—a scene that repeated itself with variations many times.

The place was a tiny flat in Shaftesbury Avenue, as near the sky as might be,—a cushioned, curtained nest, with a frivolous array of theatrical portraits on the mantlepiece, and in a frivolous pile of light and foolish songs upon the rosewood pianette, and a superfluity of macramé-work brackets on the walls. For Dora Ffrench wrought macramé-work adroitly and only laughed when she was told that it was inartistic. There was also an easel there, so that Walter Temple could paint when the mood took him and the north light could be dispensed with.

As for their talk,—that sometimes would be light, and sometimes serious, but always restful; and it was just the restfulness that Walter found so charming. He used to tell her so.

"I can't make out," she would say to him, "why you 're so fond of me. You know so many clever people, and I 'm not clever at all, and yet some-

how you don't seem to mind. Why is it, Walter? Is it because you 're clever enough for two?"

And he would answer:

"Clever, Dora? There are better things in life than being clever. Clever people now-a-days seem to spend most of their time in pretending to be cleverer than they really are. It 's amusing at first but it gets tiresome after awhile. I have found out that a clever woman is generally only a rather bad imitation of a man."

"And so you like the stupid women better, Walter?"

"No, no, Dora, you 're not stupid. If you were stupid you would n't understand what I am saying to you now. But I can't be satisfied with women who are artificial, and self-conscious, who are always looking down into their own souls to see what 's going on there. I want reality. I want human nature. I want rest. And as for you, Dora, you 're the most restful little girl I know."

"I am glad of that," she would reply, and lean her head against his knee, inviting his fingers to caress her hair; while he would wonder why it was that Eleanor always seemed more anxious to ask his opinion on stray chapters from her morbid novel, than to sit close to him and make love like that.

That would be one of the lines their talk would take. Sometimes, again, they would speak of her, and her success. For she got engagements to sing and dance in comic operas from time to time; and she sometimes gave lessons in skirt-dancing in West End houses where amateur theatricals were being organised; and having been introduced to Lady Brent at one of them, was sometimes asked to Harley Street; so that she was very grateful to Walter Temple, and he, on his part, could salve his conscience with the thought that he had really helped her, in the hour of need, to help herself.

Sometimes, again, they had their moods of melancholy when they looked out darkly into the future, wondering how they must shape their lives so as to avoid the shipwreck of one life or the other.

At such times he would feel remorse and ask her if she did n't think it would be better that he should cease to see her, so that she might forget him, and in time, get married.

"It would be hard," he would say, "terribly hard. And yet I can't help thinking it would be kinder."

But she would resist, and with a voice ready to tremble with tears, would refuse to let him go.

"No, no, it would n't be kinder," she would say. "I don't want to be married. The only thing I want is you."

And then, if he told her, as he needs must sometimes, that she must think not only of the present but of the future, she would add:

"The future? What do I care about the future? I should n't have the right to complain if everything came to an end to-night. I 've been so happy while it lasted. So never mind about the future. We 'll let things drift, Walter; we 'll just let things drift."

Then they would kiss each other and agree to let things drift, and not to trouble about the problems of the future till they faced them.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SKIRT DANCE.

ELEANOR then planned and plotted to meet Dora Ffrench at one of Lady Brent's "At Homes"; it was by no means difficult for her to get a card for one of these great functions. If her name had never been in the papers there might, indeed, have been a difficulty. In that case, it would have been necessary to be intimate with Lady Brent, and Lady Brent seldom took the trouble to know people intimately unless their names were often in the papers. The only exceptions that she made were in favour of people whose lineage was longer than her own, and people who would amuse her guests for nothing.

But, on the other hand, interesting people—people whose appearances at *premières* and private views were paragraphed, and whose names were known to other interesting people not personally acquainted with them—were always welcome at her house; and Lady Brent was always pleased to

be told of any such person who would be pleased to come. Her house, in short, on these occasions was, as Captain Armitage put it, "Like Stornoways' doncher know, only rather more so."

"The Mixer" was another title under which Captain Armitage referred to her, continuing, when invited to explain himself:

"Gets people together and mixes them; all sorts of people who would n't know how to mix if she did n't show them how; makes a sort of social salad and all that sort of thing, doncher know. Most interesting sort of salad, because you never quite know what the ingredient 's going to be."

These were his generalities; and once, when Eleanor pressed him, he had particularised.

"Well, it 's this way, Mrs. Temple," he said. "Suppose the Countess of So-and-So gets interested in some sort of a low comedian, somewhere. Wonders what he 's like in private life, and all that sort of thing. Thinks she 'd like to meet him, but does n't know how to go to work. Does n't like to ask him to her own house because she 's got an idea he 'll drink too much brandy and soda. Can't go to his house for fear he 'll think it gives him a right to come to hers. So she takes a middle course and meets him at Lady Brent's. Wonderful woman, Lady Brent! Supplies a long-felt

want, as the people say when they bring out the new magazines."

It was a fairly accurate description. Mrs. Belbrooke, when appealed to, confirmed it with an epigram suggested by a smattering of natural science.

"Lady Brent's parties," she said, "always remind me of a mechanical mixture trying to pass itself off as a chemical compound."

For all that, however, Mrs. Belbrooke was herself one of the elements that consented to be mechanically mixed by Lady Brent, and it was through her good offices that Eleanor was able to obtain the invitation that she sought. Her husband either could not or would not go with her, and she did not press him, but accepted a seat in Mrs. Belbrooke's carriage, starting from Kensington at a little before eleven o'clock.

Decidedly it was a more elaborate and luxurious reception than any she had hitherto attended. But she had long outgrown the days of innocent astonishment when the magnificence of a social function could dazzle or impress her. Such of the contrivances of luxury as she was not familiar with she could assume ; and she was so used to mixing with celebrities that the thought of meeting a more brilliant array of them, than usual, gave her no

emotion whatsoever. Besides, she was too full of her own personal emotion for any more externals to affect her.

Yet the externals were remarkable,—a great advance on the externals at Stornoway's and similar resorts of the celebrities. Her superficial self noted this abstractedly, while her inner self pursued its independent course of thought, revolving memories, forecasting possibilities, and weaving plans.

For here, for instance, instead of a subdued maid-servant, speaking softly, as though frightened by the crowd, tall footmen, attired in raiment of barbaric splendour, bawled out the names of guests in tones of lusty self-assurance ; and the drawing-rooms seemed to stretch for miles and miles ; and the stairs were wide, with carved oak banisters ; and the decoration of the hall suggested heirlooms and antiquity ; and exotic plants sprang here and there as profusely as in a forest of the tropics.

As for the guests they were mostly notables,—a few notables whom Eleanor knew, a great many more notables whom she had only heard of.

Almost the first voice that she heard, for instance, after Lady Brent and her husband Sir Julius had shaken hands with her, was the voice of Mr. Duncan Deane, developing his old theme of the inferiority of art to honest work, to the

amazement of a dowager marchioness, who had never done any honest work in all her life.

"You would n't think so much of me, I suppose," he was saying, "if I were a labourer breaking stones on the road ; but I assure you I should think a vast deal more of myself. In fact, I have broken stones in my time, when I was out in Oregon, and I can tell you I 'm far prouder of that than I am of——"

And so forth and so forth. Eleanor and Mrs. Belbrooke were out of earshot before the sentence was completed.

Then they caught a glimpse of Mr. Pyne who was entreating Mr. Baldwin Blake, the famous baritone at the Savoy, to come away early and have a little supper with him at the Eccentric Club ; and of Mrs. Brereton, who was explaining to a well-groomed young man, with an eyeglass and a low forehead, her reasons for considering his the inferior sex ; and of Stornoway, who was engaged in earnest converse with a popular Archdeacon.

"You 'll come to my place next Thursday, won't you?" he was saying. "I 've got Corkoran, the Secularist lecturer, coming. You ought to meet him. You 'll be surprised to find what a thoroughly good fellow he is when you know him well."

But these items of the miscellaneous crowd had neither importance nor interest for Eleanor ; and she had just as little interest—perhaps even less—in the various notabilities whom her host presented to her, from time to time, throughout the evening.

There were many of them, and their celebrity, as a rule, was on a larger scale than the celebrity with which the Kensington flats and studios had familiarised her. Within the space of three quarters of an hour, for instance, she had received compliments, more or less sincere, from a Lord of Appeal, a Parliamentary Under Secretary, a distinguished novelist from the United States, and a distinguished millionaire from the Transvaal Republic, and had been questioned about her methods of work by a Countess who had published two volumes of sentimental poetry at her own expense.

It surprised her a little to find that she was still interesting to so many people. It surprised her the more because the things in her which seemed to interest them had altogether lost their interest for her. A little while ago, nothing would have pleased her better than to talk about herself, and to receive the veiled or obtrusive homage of persons whom her art had moved or her publicity

made curious about her. And now she would have liked better to sit alone, unnoticed, in a corner, listening to the music that, from time to time, lightened the burden of the talkers, and watching till she could see that which she had come to see.

Instead, she found herself talking much as she had been used to talk in the times when the interviewers had unearthed her, bringing an introduction from Mr. Court, who always exhorted the writers for whom he published to be interviewed as frequently as possible.

For instance :

" Now do tell me when you first began to write, Mrs. Temple," the Countess asked her. " I suppose, like the rest of us, you began to spoil paper when you were a school-girl."

And Eleanor answered :

" Oh, no, it was n't till I came to London, and met other women who were writing. Indeed, I don't know that I should have written even then if I had n't fancied that I 'd got something to say. It does n't seem to be anything so very important now I 've said it, but it did seem important then."

And the inquisitor went on :

" And now, if you won't think me rude, I 'll ask another question. When you 're writing a story,

do you plan it all out beforehand, and make notes, or do you write just what comes into your head as you go along?"

And Eleanor struggled with her impatience at this searching cross-examination and replied politely, as she had often replied to enquiries equally fatuous before:

"Of course one can't begin to tell a story without knowing what story one is going to tell. But then, on the other hand, one can't very well write a story out, without making fresh discoveries about it and wanting to alter it a little here and there."

In this way she talked of one thing while her mind was striving to fasten itself upon another, and had to be restrained from its desire to wander by painful and repeated effort.

Her eyes too were inattentive to her interlocutor, and searched the room restlessly at every chance, scanning the faces that passed within their range, and trying to divine those beyond their reach, until, at last, a sudden movement in the crowd, and a partial lulling of the voices near her, showed that something was about to happen for the entertainment of the company.

"What is it?" she asked, breaking off in the middle of her reply to the inevitable question

whether she preferred working in the day-time or at night.

"Somebody 's going to give us a skirt dance, I think," the Countess answered. "Oh, yes! It 's that little girl from the Savoy, Dora Ffrench. I 've seen her here before, and a very pretty little dancer she is."

She rattled on, forgetting literature in the presence of a more absorbing actuality, and making general observations about skirt-dancing.

"Most remarkable craze, is n't it? I wonder how long it 's going to last. Do you know I never can quite make up my mind whether one ought to think it vulgar or not. What do you think? It does bring classes together in the most extraordinary way, does n't it? At least it does here, though of course it need n't do so anywhere else."

But Eleanor was not listening. The words fell upon her ears as though they had been a sentence from some other conversation, overheard by accident, and claiming neither attention nor reply. Her one thought was to draw nearer, and look searchingly into the eyes of this common dancing girl who had been able to win love where she had been able to win nothing more than friendship.

"I think I must see this," she said, and rising from her place took a seat upon an ottoman nearer

to the dancer as the dreamy prelude of the music was beginning.

A pretty girl, she admitted, her thoughts keeping time, as it were, to the rhythmic pulsations of the melody. Oh, yes, decidedly a pretty girl. Not quite so beautiful as herself. A severe critic could find fault with her features, saying that her mouth was too big, and her forehead not broad enough for brains,—inferiorities to be marked with satisfaction. No, not so beautiful as herself, and not so beautiful, either, as that portrait had made her seem to be. For there every coarse line that could have suggested lowly origin was eliminated, and the face was spiritualised, and the dark eyes shone as though the mind held converse only with pure and holy joys ; while here one saw her as she really was, and noted, if one cared to be censorious, a failing of delicacy in her features, and marked no more spirituality in her eyes than any woman who cares for music gains by listening to it. And yet, when all was said, a pretty girl—quite unmistakably a pretty girl.

And very graceful too, as well as very pretty. Not, indeed, with that higher grace which joins hands with dignity. One would not expect her to look queenly in repose ; there might even seem to be something insignificant about her then. Yet

rhythmic movement gave her a grace that almost bordered upon dignity. Watching her one was inevitably drawn to think of the old phrase that "dancing is the poetry of motion."

For she danced well, though she was not yet one of the two or three dancers whom all London ran to see and came home to rave about. There was an art in her dancing analogous to the poet's art. It played on the emotions, hinting at more than it expressed, suggesting trains of voluptuous reverie, yet all with the subdued and quiet delicacy which the audiences of drawing-rooms approve. Dreamy and slow, at first, with graceful waving of the hands, and pliant swaying of the bust, the dance grew gradually wilder and more abandoned as the music quickened. The white hands gripped the pleated skirt, and tossed their deep folds out to right and left. The dancer ran forward, up the room, to a sudden burst of rapid music, and without visible effort, stopped herself as suddenly, and zig-zagged back again. Then there was more tripping to right and left, and more scattering of the muslin draperies, faster and more tumultuous every instant, till, at last, as the accompaniment reached its loudest and most furious, she sank slowly down upon one knee, with the ribbons still quivering on the diaphanous gauze of heliotrope.

It was over, and the spell was broken by the clapping of gloved hands, and the gentle murmur of well-bred applause.

"How very charming," people cooed, "what a pity it is over so quickly"; while Lady Brent came over to the dancer, and thanked her, and hoped that she had n't tired herself too much.

Eleanor, like the others was conscious of the charm. Whatever the thoughts beneath the surface, it could not but be that the music and the colour and the movement should warm her blood a little. But the charm snapped, and her blood was cold again before the last note had finished its vibrations. Her one thought now was that the purpose of her visit to the house was not yet fulfilled, and that she must make haste if she would gain her end. It might so easily be that Lady Brent might not encourage the dancing girl to stay very long, now that she had done her duty, and amused her guests.

And there, close to her elbow in the crowd, was Stornoway—the one man in all London who might be relied upon to help her in this crisis.

"Stornoway knows everybody," she reflected, "and even when he does n't he introduces them just as if he did." So she spoke to him:

"I suppose you know the skirt-dancer, Mr.

Stornoway. If you do, I wish you 'd introduce me to her."

Stornoway's face showed no symptom of surprise. Perhaps he knew nothing that could make the request appear surprising. Or perhaps the man who thought that the archdeacons ought to know the atheists was capable of any introduction. Eleanor had no time to wonder which explanation was the right one ; for he replied at once :

"With pleasure, Mrs. Temple," adding, as it were an afterthought. " A most interesting woman. Quite a woman you ought to know."

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW AMBITION.

"MISS FFRENCH, will you allow me to make you acquainted with Mrs. Temple? Of course you 've read all Mrs. Temple's novels."

Stornoway murmured the formula and vanished. Dora was so hemmed in by furniture and people that the chance of declining the introduction, which she would have been glad of, did not present itself; and Eleanor was free to examine and analyse her as she had proposed to do.

She was embarrassed, but the other woman's embarrassment was naturally greater, verging even upon fright. It seemed so likely that there would be a scene. The women whom she had known before she came under humanising influences used to make scenes, when they were jealous, without regard to time or place. The presence of distinguished company would rather encourage them than otherwise with the thought that it would make

a rival's shame the greater. Involuntarily, therefore, she shrank back into her chair, as though she feared to have her face scratched, or her hair pulled.

Eleanor saw the gesture and misunderstood it as a sign of merely moral cowardice. It pleased her. It even encouraged her a little. Yet the task of making conversation continued to be difficult. With time to take thought, she might have found something to say that was neither an abject commonplace nor a naive resolution of her feelings. But it was necessary to begin to talk at once, and only the most futile remarks came into her mind.

"You dance very prettily, Miss Ffrench," she said.

"I 've practised a good deal," Dora answered, trying unsuccessfully to catch the eye of Mr. Baldwin Blake, and beckon him over to release her.

It was easier to go on talking about dancing than to search in a hurry for some other neutral subject more appropriate to the situation.

So Eleanor continued :

"I suppose you are very fond of dancing."

"I don't know. It 's a business like another," was the inattentive answer, while the wandering eyes were still bent upon their wandering quest.

But the occasion was here for a half-hidden

flash of scorn, and Eleanor was quick to snatch at it.

"You call it only a business, then. You don't look upon it as an art."

As a sarcasm the remark was thrown away, though it roused Dora to a greater show of interest.

"An art *is* a business, surely, when you get paid for it," she retorted. "Otherwise, why don't people give away their poems and pictures instead of asking us to pay for them."

A foolish confusion of ideas! How could Walter possibly tolerate a girl who harboured it? Or was it that she really knew better, and only said this because it had the air of being a repartee, and she wished to make herself unpleasant? Or was it, again, that a certain vulgarity of mind that had to be repressed in Walter's presence was giving itself a little holiday at Lady Brent's?

Eleanor put these questions to herself and could not answer them. Yet she saw that the speech furnished a chance that she was glad to seize—the chance to make, without doing violence to good-breeding, a somewhat public exhibition of this dancing girl's dulness and ignorance of her betters' points of view.

She glanced round, looking for an audience, and had quickly gathered one.

Stornoway and Duncan Deane were the only men she knew who were near enough to be spoken to, and she called to them:

"Mr. Deane! Mr. Stornoway! Miss Ffrench and I are discussing an interesting question of art, and we want you to help us with your opinion. Miss Ffrench says that an art becomes a business whenever the work of art is paid for. I hold that, if that is the case, the converse must be true, and grocery, for instance, becomes an art whenever a pound of candles is paid for. Can your masculine logic find any fallacy in that argument!"

Stornoway and Duncan approached, and one or two other people who had heard turned round to listen. Stornoway, who had been at Oxford muttered the words "undistributed middle," and someone else suggested a revision of the major premiss, and within the space of half a minute, Dora Ffrench found herself entangled in a conversation full of words which she had never heard before.

For Eleanor pushed her advantage, as she esteemed it, with an untiring cruelty, the bitterness of her soul made her spiteful after a fashion that was foreign to her nature.

"This woman is a fool, and you can make her look and feel a fool."

So impulse urged her, and she acted on it, turn-

ing the talk from theme to theme, but always fastening upon themes that must be over the heads of stupid or uneducated people. Now she spoke of Ibsenism, now of Decadents, now of the Impressionists. She referred to Degas, to Verlaine, to the author of "Ionica," to Robert Brydges,—to any notable name, in short, which was likely to be unknown to the dancing girl and familiar to her other listeners.

Stornoway showed a tendency to break in with irrelevant anecdotes of the private lives of these great men. Duncan Deane seemed anxious to monopolise her in a duologue in which his should be the leading role. But she resisted both of them by chattering rapidly, and appealing, every half minute or so, to Dora Ffrench with a question inviting some fresh exhibition of her folly or her ignorance.

For she would say, for instance :

"Don't you agree with me, Miss Ffrench, that there is room for symbolism in literature as well as in art?"

Or again—

"Now, Miss Ffrench, do you think that Mr. Deane's theory of the meaning of 'The Master Builder' is the right one."

And Dora Ffrench was forced to make it clear

to educated people that symbolism was a word without a meaning to her, and that her only knowledge of "The Master Builder" came from a parody in *Punch.*

It was a pitful scene—the more pitiful because every one of the by-standers saw the malice, and Duncan Deane at least, divined the motive that inspired it, and was in an agony lest the others should divine it too, and smile.

Moreover, as was natural, the malice failed of its effect. Because Dora Ffrench was pretty, and helpless in the face of educated insolence, impartial men were angry to see her so pointedly held up to scorn. Instead of despising her, they grew indignant to see her treated so outrageously.

"I 'm off. I can't stand this any longer. D—d if I can," one man muttered to his neighbour, and turned away with a curtness that was intended to be remarked.

Another came more usefully to the rescue, trying to divert the shafts of Eleanor's sarcasm to his own broader bosom.

"'P on my word, Mrs. Temple," he said, "I don't understand 'The Master Builder' myself, though I 've seen it twice. I daresay you 'll think me an awfully ignorant person, but I don't believe it 's got a meaning. It seemed to me, for all the

world, like an acrostic or conundrum or something of that sort. What's the answer to it? Please say something to illuminate my darkness. The smallest contribution will be thankfully received."

And so forth, and so forth, rattling off words with no other purpose than to save the dancing girl from an enemy who tried to make her blush.

His volubility gave Dora the chance that she was looking for. At last she managed to catch the eye of Mr. Baldwin Blake.

"Take me where the claret cup is," she whispered to him, and so fled leaving Eleanor arguing out with her protector a question in which neither of them now retained the smallest interest.

Eleanor was conscious of her defeat. She knew that it would be useless to endeavour to retrieve it. She knew too that her reputation for good manners required that she should cover it by continuing the aimless discussion of the merits of "The Master Builder" with the same energy and spirit as before.

Yet, as each of the disputants was disputing only for appearance' sake, and without the least wish to convince the other, it was not long before the argument was done with; and Eleanor was in no temper to start another in its place. The group of which she had been the centre melted,

to be absorbed in other groups, and she brooded, alone, on her discomfiture, and reflected that she had found nothing so far in this dancing girl which could explain why an intelligent man should prefer her to herself.

"She 's pretty enough, certainly, but she talks like a perfect simpleton. What can it be that they see in her?" she asked herself, with the lofty scorn which every clever woman is a little apt to have for her intellectual inferiors until experience comes to teach her better.

And yet that men—and even men of more than the average of intelligence—were pleased to talk with Dora Ffrench was clear enough. She prattled plentifully, as Eleanor could mark, when she caught sight of her from time to time, though she left deep truth and daring paradox to others; and the men to whom she prattled were evidently very far from being bored. They came down to her level with surprising ease, and talked nonsense as though it were a pleasant change from sense.

And Eleanor was puzzled. She could see nothing attractive in a stupid man, however handsome. Then what should a clever man see to attract him in a silly girl, however pretty? It was a problem that appeared to need a vast deal of thinking out.

For a long time it baffled her; and when the

answer came it was as the lightning flash of a sudden intuition.

"I'm tired—terribly tired—too tired to talk," she had said to Mrs. Belbrooke, as they drove home together.

"Very well, dear, I won't trouble you. I'm a little tired myself," Mrs. Belbrooke had answered.

So, instead of chattering of the evening's incidents, and canvassing the people they had met, Eleanor muffled herself in her wraps, and, leaning back in her corner of the carriage, dwelt with her own tormenting thoughts.

For a while these travelled in a hideous circle nowhere. But presently, when she had said good-night to Mrs. Belbrooke, and was driving on to the studio alone, the inspiration broke upon her unawares, as though some voice from the unseen had breathed it in her ear.

"He likes doll-women!"

That was the invading inspiration that burst in on her, suggested by she knew not what. Again and again, as the carriage rolled with her through the dark and empty streets, whose peace and quietness seemed to mock and insult her trouble, she said the words over to herself:

"Walter likes doll-women! Walter likes doll-women!"

The brougham reached the studio, and the maid-servant who opened the door to her, told her that her husband had gone to bed some time before. She went upstairs to her own room and turned up the gas, and put a match to the asbestos stove, and with her wraps still drawn close about her shoulders, threw herself on the couch at the foot of the bed to think. And as she thought, or tried to think, her lips still automatically, as it were, continued to repeat the same refrain :

" Walter likes doll-women ! Walter likes doll-women ! "

Then, after a space, a second thought grew out of the first.

" Yes, he likes doll-women ! I am too clever for him,—too complex. I suppose I can't help it. And yet, I don't know. I wonder—I wonder if I could simplify myself."

Her own phrase startled her. It ought to have been new, and yet it seemed familiar. Ah ! yes. She recollected. She had been reading *Terre Vierge*,—the French version of that wonderful story of Turgenieff's in which he tells how Alexis Nejdanoff, the peasant reformer, killed himself for shame at his failure to make himself intelligible to a perverse and foolish generation.

"*Je n'ai pas su me simplifier*," he said, and then fired a pistol bullet through his heart.

Her thought, then, was a reminiscence—an unconscious echo of the passage. A cruel irony forbade her to be original, even in her most solemn moods.

It was a reminiscence, too, of evil omen. At least, her first impulse was to think so. But she fought the impulse down, telling herself that she had always thought Alexis Nejdanoff a poor weak fool, alike for what he did and what he failed to do. Surely it must be easy to be simple if one wished. The hard thing was to be complex. She could understand the person who tried that and failed.

"Oh, yes," she murmured, raising herself from the couch and looking at herself in the mirror, as though that could show her some index of her powers. "Oh, yes, I can be simple. I can be a doll-woman if I choose. And I do choose, now that I know that Walter likes doll-women best."

She paced up and down the room, flushed by the whirling reverie that followed on the strange resolution she had taken, and then stopping suddenly stood pensively in front of the rosewood writing desk.

Some sheets of manuscript were lying there—the last pages of that new novel which she had tried

to write and failed to finish, because the troubles of her own soul had grown up and choked her interest in it. She leant over them meditatively as though she hesitated before taking the irrevocable step.

After a little, the hysterical laugh broke out again.

"Yes, yes, I 'll make a beginning now," she said, and gathering up the sheets, knelt down in front of the asbestos stove, and held them resolutely in the blaze till they were consumed to ashes.

The strain was over and a great weight seemed to be lifted from her mind. She undressed quietly, and turned the light out, and got into bed with a calm happiness which she had not known for many months.

"I 'm going to be a doll-woman," she kept repeating. "I 'm going to be a doll-woman now, because I know that Walter likes doll-women best."

And with her lips still murmuring the words and her mind still dwelling on the thought, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

CROSS PURPOSES.

"I WONDER if I could simplify myself!"

The phrase had flitted vaguely through the vague dreams that weaved themselves towards the end of Eleanor's long sleep, and when, at mid-day, she awoke, and stretched her arms and rubbed her eyes, it sprang again at once unbidden to her mind.

Her resolution was no less firm than when she had taken it the night before, her nerves all trembling with excitement, only, with the daylight, and the calm that daylight brought, difficulties which had then been hidden showed themselves. She had to argue with herself to prove that what she was resolved to do was feasible. Yet, principally perhaps because she wished to be convinced herself.

"If the drunkard can be sobered," she reasoned, "or the heathen brought to faith, or the dissolute made to live cleanly by the sudden shock of a

prayer-meeting, or a sermon, then surely, for her love's sake, a woman may learn how to be simple, may learn even how to be foolish if the need should be."

So she would simplify herself, and she would begin her simplification by some overt act, even as the drunkard marked his new birth by the signing of the pledge, or the wicked man by kneeling down at the penitent's form to pray in the presence of a multitude of his fellow-sinners. She felt the need of some such drastic step to give her an impetus, as it were, and clear the air for her, helping her to see and understand what steps should follow.

Her first impulse was to write something in her diary,—to sketch for herself some hasty analysis of the new mood that had taken hold of her,—some memorandum of the strange determination she had formed. She had even written a few lines before it flashed on her that this was out of character with her resolve. Then she soliloquised:

"Simple people don't keep that sort of diary," she told herself. "It 's too much like Marie Bashkirtseff. I must n't make her my model," and so saying she pulled the leaf out of the book, and tore it up, and flung the fragments into the waste-paper basket.

Her fingers were even ready to tear the other

leaves in pieces after it. But some instinct of egoism, yet unconquered, hindered her, and she was content to lock it up, buried out of sight at the bottom of a drawer.

And yet the immediate need of doing something drastic, so that her action might impress itself upon her mind and guide its workings, still weighed upon her heavily.

"I must make a beginning somehow," she reflected, and sat pondering how the beginning should be made.

But how? For a moment the wish crossed her mind that she were a Roman Catholic, so that she might kneel in the confession box, and tell her troubles to a priest, and take his counsel. But the wish went as quickly as it came. For hers were troubles not to be served by the telling beads, or the recital of formal orisons, and not to be confessed to any man or woman. She must face them, and battle with them, alone.

How, then, to make a beginning? She might try, of course, to choose simpler friends,—to withdraw herself from the influence of such women as Mrs. Brereton and Mrs. Belbrooke, and of such men as Stornoway and Duncan Deane. So much was clear. She might even—though the use of that expedient was not so certain—invite some of

the simple folk she knew at Barnstaple to come and visit her, in the hope that they might help her to be simple. But these were things to be done gradually and gently, not sudden measures to be adopted on the moment. Since she must needs sustain herself by instant demonstration, there was one thing only—and that a very little thing—that she could do.

She could alter the appearance of her room a little—subdue the air it had of a place wherein to hold communion with lofty thoughts,—make it, in short, a simpler room. This she would do at once, even though it should involve extravagances such as turning some of the pictures round to face the wall.

That stern ascetic symbolism, however, was not needed. More trivial changes, less painful to the eye sufficed. She destroyed, or locked away, all scraps of manuscript that could remind her of her literary yearnings, allowing only fancy note-paper and envelopes to lie about her desk. She hunted up from the bottom of a drawer some fancy-work that she had done in her inartistic days, and arranged it fantastically about the room, just as she supposed that the doll-woman who was her rival would have arranged it. She also found a handful of old birthday cards, printed in Germany,

and made a pattern with them along the mantel-piece. And all this was not for Walter's eye, for he hardly ever came into the room, but to make an abiding impression on herself, and remind her constantly of this new ideal of hers.

This done, she sat and thought till a further inspiration came to her. The volumes on the shelves of her revolving book-case gave her the new idea she looked for. The translations of Ibsen's plays were there, and some poems of the new-fangled shameless sort that Mr. Court was proud to publish, and some morbid modern novels, written by fearless women who handled sex-problems fearlessly,—morbid novels like her own that had succeeded, because—as Mrs. Belbrooke put it,—the disease was epidemic.

Eleanor looked at them, reading and re-reading the titles on their backs.

"I suppose a simple woman has no use for books like that," she said. "Something by Miss Braddon, or Mrs. Henry Wood would be a good deal more appropriate. I suppose I can get a taste for it if I try."

Then she put the books all together in a pile—extracting only *Terre Vierge* in which she had found the new gospel that was to guide her—and proceeded to carry them downstairs to the book-case in the dining-room.

Chance had it that her husband was coming up the stairs as she descended them. She fancied he would ask her what she was doing, and why she did it, and wondered how to frame her answer.

But the fear was groundless. He only said, after "good-morning":

"You 're looking a little pale, Eleanor. I 'm afraid late hours are n't very good for you"; and then added without waiting for a reply:

"It 's rather a heavy weight you 've got there. Won't you let me carry it for you?"

She thanked him, and slid half of the books into his arms. He carried them down into the dining-room, and helped her re-arrange them in the shelves, and so assisted at the beginning of Eleanor's simplification, without imagining that he was taking part in anything more serious than one of those purposeless periodical "turn-outs" to which he believed all women—even the most intellectual—to be incurably addicted.

It seemed an auspicious accident, until he broke the spell,

"I suppose this is the beginning of Spring cleaning?" he asked in the tones of a man who resigns himself good-temperedly to the inevitable.

She reassured him upon that point, trying, at

the same time, to say something that should prepare him for the change in her.

"Oh, no!" she answered, "I 'm only turning these books out of my room. "I 'm tired of them, and I don't think they 're very good for me, do you?"

"My dear Eleanor," he protested, "I 'm sure you 're far too clever and thoughtful to be harmed by any book that you may read."

But for once she insisted on having his opinion.

"Do look at them and tell me what you think," she said.

He ran his finger along the row, reading the titles. He pulled out one or two of the volumes, opened them at the title-pages, remarked the writers' names, and put them back. Then he summed up his estimate of them carelessly, as though the matter were one of no particular importance.

"It is n't the sort I like best," he said. "These new women writers like Mrs. Brereton don't seem to me to have any real grip on life,—or on grammar either for that matter. To my mind, there 's more sense, as well as more style, in Stevenson. But then, as you know, I don't ask you to agree with me, if you don't want to. No doubt it 's better for you to think these things out for yourself."

Evidently he was not yet prepared to accept her in her new rôle of the simple woman. She saw it, and was afraid to tell him bluntly that she wanted him to think things out for her—wanted to submit her tastes and preferences to his. That was a discovery that must dawn upon him slowly to have its right effect. Meanwhile, she could only try to explain herself to him obliquely and indirectly by a hint.

She told him about *Terre Vierge.*

"That book," she said, describing it, "in which the man tried to simplify himself, and found he could n't. It seems to me the most wonderful thought Turgenieff ever had. Only he ought n't to have let the book end so miserably. I 'm sure we all—all of us who are complex—could simplify ourselves if we tried."

But Walter did not perceive that any second meaning underlay her words. What she intended to be a revelation of her soul, was to him only a piece of literary criticism, and he dealt with it as such.

"I have n't read the book," he said. "You must lend it to me, and then I 'll tell you what I think. And now you must let me get back to work before the light is spoilt."

That was their first talk, and it led them nowhere.

For so far from serving to explain Eleanor to Walter, it failed even to suggest to him that there was anything to be explained. He had his fixed ideas of her, and it evidently needed more than subtle half-veiled hints to shake them.

The talks that followed within the next few days were no more profitable. If they led anywhere it was towards estrangement; and if they did not bring about a quarrel, that was only because Walter Temple really liked his wife, and was resolved to be indulgent with her.

There was a day, for instance, when he called her up into the studio, and asked her to criticise some work that he was doing.

A long sentence, all in the jargon of art criticism, sprang up in her mind; but she would not allow her lips to speak it. Standing in front of the unfinished painting, she acted her new part—admired mutely without discrimination as she supposed that other woman—the doll-woman—would have done.

"It 's beautiful," she said. "It 'll be a lovely picture when you 've finished it. How long do you think you 'll be?"

She despised herself for prattling so absurdly; and she detected more than a shade of annoyance in Walter's tones, when he went on:

"Yes, yes, my dear, I daresay it'll be all right by and bye. But just at present don't you see, I'm stuck. There's something wrong with the colour scheme here, and I can't make up my mind what it is. Look at it now, and see if you can't make a suggestion of some sort?"

She thought she knew the very thing to say to help him. But she felt that a doll-woman had no right to know, and therefore she would not say it.

"How can I help you, Walter? You are so clever. You know so much better than I do," she replied.

It was just the answer that Dora would have given him, and from her it would have seemed only a proper and pleasing tribute to his genius. He would have put his arm around her neck and kissed her and gone on working contentedly without her help. But from his wife he expected knowledge, intelligent comment, and, at a pinch, sometimes, even inspiration. He could not understand her sudden affectation of humility, but pressed her on the point.

"But look at it again and think, Eleanor," he said. "You're so often able to help me. You may n't be able to paint, but you do really know about these things."

But she was still determined to be humble—to

seem stupid even, if the need was, rather than to figure as his equal in the discussion of a point of art.

"No, no, I don't know," she answered. "I may have tried to talk as if I did. But I never really knew about these things. How could I?"

He was surprised and very nearly angry. It seemed to him that she deliberately withheld her interest for some reason that she would not give. Yet, as he had never quarrelled with her, he would not quarrel now; and as he looked searchingly into her eyes, and marked black rings surrounding them, a possible explanation of her strangeness struck him.

"You 're not looking well, my dear," he said. "Never mind about the picture. But don't you think you 'd better see the doctor? Or would you like to run down to Barnstaple and stay at the Vicarage for a bit, for change of air?"

That was the irony of it—he misunderstood her. She was trying to be a doll-woman, that he might love her better; and, because she differed from her normal self, he thought that she was ill and wanted change of air.

Had she been a doll-woman really she would have cried helplessly and clung to him, and kissed him. But the habits of years were too strong to break down in such sudden fashion. She had not

simplified herself enough for that,—not yet, at all events.

Nor could she, as some women would have done, break in with recriminations and reproaches, and tell him what she knew. She had thought out the riddle of life sufficiently to be quite sure that a man would never give love freely to a woman who claimed it as a due that is being wrongfully withheld from her. It would be like suing for the payment of a debt of honour. To complain, in short, would be no less a thing than to surrender hope; while to do as he proposed, and go down to Barnstaple for change of air was equally a perilous course to take. For that would be to leave him free, letting him think that his society was nothing to her. So she said:

"No, I'm not ill, Walter. At least, there's nothing worth speaking of the matter with me. And I'd rather be with you. You don't mind my staying with you, Walter, do you?"

He did not understand at all, but was more sure than ever that she must be ill.

"My dear child, you know that I am always pleased to have you with me," he protested. "I only suggested that you should go into the country for a fortnight, because I thought it would be good for you."

"I know, I know. You 're always very kind to me, Walter," she replied; and then made bold to add:

"But I 'm a little lonely, sometimes, when you 're so busy. Would you mind very much if I asked one of my friends to come and stay with me for a little while?"

"Of course not," he answered; "I thought you were always busy yourself, with your books and so on. But, if you 're not, by all means ask anyone you like to stay with you."

So it was settled, and that same evening Eleanor wrote a letter to Mrs. Bryant, of Barnstaple, inviting her to come and visit her.

Her first thought had been to ask Lily Marston to be her guest. But she knew that that might involve calls upon Mrs. Brereton and others of the advanced women whom now she did not wish to see. So she dismissed the thought, and wrote to Mrs. Bryant. With Mrs. Bryant for her constant companion, she felt that it would be difficult not to simplify herself.

Then, having put that letter in its envelope, she straightway wrote another. It was addressed to the Secretary of the Pioneer Club, and ran as follows:

"DEAR MADAM: I write to ask you to accept my resignation of my membership of the Pioneer Club, as I find that I am no longer in sympathy with the principles with which it is associated.

"Yours very truly,

"ELEANOR TEMPLE."

CHAPTER XV.

SIMPLIFICATION.

THAT was the beginning of the Simplification of Eleanor,—the beginning merely.

It was even, as she afterwards came to think, a crude and blundering beginning that only touched externals instead of striking at the heart of her spiritual life. That is to say, it was a beginning to which no satisfactory end belonged. The one thing needful that it might work out rightly was that Walter should have grasped its purport, and watched its progress sympathetically. But that one thing was wanting.

For Walter fancied that he understood his wife, —fancied that he knew exactly what she could and what she could not give him.

Had there been anyone who might presume to catechise him, he could have defined the attraction that she had for him with a remarkable precision.

"Frank friendship, ready *camaraderie*, distinc-

tion of manner, intelligent companionship,"—so he would have summed up the virtues, other than physical, that graced her, adding, perhaps, by way of a corollary, that the intelligence was sometimes inopportune and therefore tiring, and the finely forged temperament apt to lead her into moods which chilled him because they clashed with his.

And, no less clearly, he could have told a confessor what it was he missed in Eleanor. "Passion," he would have said, "is wanting—the passion whose light shows things in their true proportions, and makes even the artist see that art is the handmaid of life, and not life the handmaid of the arts. And restfulness is wanting too. The thing that an artist wants from a woman most of all is restfulness; and restfulness is what another artistic temperament never by any possibility can give him."

That is how his feelings would have shaped themselves if he had had need or occasion to analyse them and put them into words. Restfulness,—that, it seemed to him, was the one thing supremely wanting. The only woman, he felt, who could satisfy him must be a woman whose mere presence calmed and soothed him,—a woman on whose breast he could forget all the troubles, and turmoils, and disappointments, and nerve agonies

of the artistic life. But how should this peace be found on the breast of a woman who lived a complex spiritual life apart from his, who liked to be rather a human document than a human being? It seemed almost an act of sacrilege to ask for such a thing.

Therefore he did not ask for it. He was in the plight of the unhappy husband in Mrs. Belbrooke's story, and now that Dora Ffrench had come into his life again, the thought of asking for it was never present to his mind. His wife and he were friends. They liked each other very much. She had herself confessed that nothing better seemed possible between them; and there the matter ought to end.

So Walter was unobservant, and Eleanor's efforts to simplify herself were quite without a meaning to him. Such scraps of dialogue as they gave rise to only served to deepen his perplexity. For she was afraid as yet to do more than hint darkly, or to speak, except in riddles.

He inferred nothing, for example, from her sudden withdrawal from the Pioneer Club, although she tried to hint her reasons for it. It seemed to him only a fitting subject for a little friendly raillery.

"What 's the motive of it, Eleanor?" he asked

her. "Are the other members getting too advanced for you?"

"I think it's rather that I don't feel myself quite advanced enough for them, Walter," she replied, and he continued:

"I never thought you were. But what's the special grievance now? Have they taken to wearing knickerbockers, or smoking pipes? Or is it merely a question of tilting up their chairs and putting their feet upon the drawing-room mantelpiece?"

"You're silly, Walter," she said, and forced a laugh.

"On the contrary, I'm serious," he protested. "I really want to know."

She explained:

"Well, of course, there's no ridiculous reason of that sort."

"No little squabble with the Committee, then, I hope?" he interposed.

For Mrs. Belbrooke had once told him, in a con-confidential hour that internal dissensions always raged furiously in women's clubs. "We've had so little experience," she had explained. "No doubt we shall get on better with each other when we've had more practice."

But upon this point also, Eleanor reassured him.

"No, nothing of that sort, either," she said. "Only, I 've thought things over lately, and I feel that it 's a mistake for women to get mixed up in movements, and all that sort of thing. It 's taking one's self too seriously."

She paused. The next sentence was to reveal her secret to him, if he chose to see it. Yet something hindered her from speaking it with all the emphasis it needed.

"For, do you know, Walter, I 've sometimes thought that perhaps you and I might be more to each other if I tried not to take myself quite so seriously."

He did not understand. It was impossible for him to imagine Eleanor taking herself otherwise than seriously. Was it not because she took herself seriously, let her brain range beyond the limits that confine the brains of average women that she had attracted him from the beginning? He had always supposed so, and the supposition framed his answer for him.

"But, my dear child, why will you try to talk as if you were one of the foolish, brainless little women?"

"Perhaps, if you only knew it, I really am one of the brainless, foolish little women, Walter," she protested.

But his protest was more emphatic, and very nearly verged on indignation.

"Nonsense, nonsense, you 're a clever woman, Eleanor, and a man has no right to expect a clever woman to suppress herself—to trample on her temperament—to refuse to take herself seriously. Besides, a clever woman, as you are, could n't do it, even if she tried. Her temperament would be too strong for her. No, no, you must take yourself seriously as other people take you. Nobody asks you to neglect your home, or, as you say to 'get mixed up in movements.' I know you 've never done that or wished to do it. But why should n't you use your talents and do the best work you can? You know very well that when you 've done it, nobody is prouder or more pleased than I am."

It was a long speech, and at the end of it he kissed her on the forehead; but the kiss did not save her from the troubling sense of having been misunderstood. For she did not want him to be proud of her; she wanted him to love her. And he did not love her. She could tell that quite well from the way in which he kissed her.

The incident passed, therefore, without enlightening Walter; and the visit from Mrs. Bryant, of Barnstaple, enlightened him still less. Since it

was his wife's whim to have her at the house, he made no opposition and acquiesced politely in her presence. But the whim was a mystery which he could not fathom, and he expressed relief when it was gratified, and Mrs. Bryant had gone home again.

Nor did the visit have upon Eleanor herself precisely the effect which she had contemplated. Mrs. Bryant's particular kind of simplicity did not soothe her as she had assumed it would. It rather jarred on her, reviving the old insolent sense of superiority that she had been wont to feel in the presence of Barnstaple notables, impelling her to fall in love again with the distinction which a superior culture and a more morbid imagination, and a more nervously organised temperament bestowed on her.

For Mrs. Bryant came in a glaring gown and an Old World bonnet, looking like a highly respectable housekeeper dressed for church. She was out of her element in studios and Bohemian flats. Nude studies had to be hidden from her, for fear they should offend her moral sense ; and she was rather given to asking the people what place of worship they attended, and warning Eleanor against them when she learnt that they attended none.

"Without prayer, my dear," she would explain,

"they can't expect any real blessing on their labours ; and no doubt that 's the reason why that good and clever writer, Emma Jane Worboise, is so much more thought of in Barnstaple, than your friends, Mrs. Belbrooke and Mr. Duncan Deane."

She also expressed surprise at the discovery that there was no reading of family prayers in the studio, whether in the morning or in the evening, and that Walter Temple said no grace either before or after meat.

"If you don't ask for a blessing on your food you can't look for one, especially you being a clergyman's son," she said, and she was visibly distressed when Walter racked his memory for a grace and only found the one which ran,

"God give us plenty, and to others thankful hearts."

These little incidents apart, Mrs. Bryant did, indeed, enjoy herself tolerably well in London. In the first place, she had news to tell, and she always felt a little flutter of pride when she was telling news, however unimportant.

She told, for example, how Mr. Masterton, of Crescent Hill, had lectured on Saturn's rings at the Mechanic's Institute, and published the lecture as a pamphlet at his own expense ; and how the

new curate—the successor of the Reverend Paul Devine—had caused pew-rents to fall off by advocating the celibacy of the clergy.

"Barnstaple people," she explained, "don't hold with these Roman Catholic doctrines, especially with so many unmarried girls about."

She also had news to tell of Eleanor's early lovers—of Mr. Richard Wantage and Mr. Alfred Fletcher.

For, of the former, she said:

"He married a bar-maid, my dear—actually married a bar-maid at the Red Lion, and they do say that there was very good reason why, and of course nobody calls on them, and the story is that she 's made him promise to give up the law and go into the hotel business at Martshoe. You had a very lucky escape there, my dear—a very lucky escape indeed."

And of the other:

"He 's doing very well. He 's Chairman of the Northmolton Local Board, and drives his wife into Barnstaple in a dog-cart on Saturdays to do her shopping. Only to think it might just as well have been you, though I daresay, after London, you 'd find Northmolton a little dull."

With anecdote of that sort abundantly available, she bore up cheerfully in the midst of uncongenial

surroundings ; and she also went about a good deal to see the sights.

She went to Westminster Abbey and to St. Paul's Cathedral—to the Zoological Gardens and Madame Tussaud's—to Cleopatra's Needle, and the South Kensington Museum and the Tower of London. She heard sermons by Dr. Parker and the Reverend Paul Devine. She wept over an Adelphi melodrama, and asked Eleanor whether she did n't hope that she too would some day be able to write like that.

These pleasures, operated, to a certain extent, as an antidote to the conversations which she heard one evening at the Stornoways' where Mrs. Morecomb asked her whether she thought it just that men alone should have the right to sow wild oats, and Mr. Marcus Brande discoursed of the new Paganism, leaving her under the impression that he wished to restore the worship of idols in the land. So she was able, when she went away, to thank Eleanor, without doing violence to her conscience, for a very pleasant visit ; and then she got into the train at Waterloo, and two days afterwards, forwarded two pounds of clotted cream, carefully packed in a coffee tin, by way of a thank-offering for hospitality.

Yet, long before she went, Eleanor had perceived

that she could learn nothing that would profit her from the simplicity of Mrs. Bryant. Hers was not the sort of simplicity that would avail her,—that would commend itself to Walter.

"That 's not simplicity, but provincialism," she reflected. "I don't want provincialism. Provincialism is worse than everything."

The sentiment possessed her thoughts when she and Walter drove to Waterloo to see Mrs. Bryant off.

There was all the formal enthusiasm of leave-taking. The good lady insisted upon kissing both of them. She had enjoyed herself so much she said. So many thanks for all their kindness, and for the luncheon basket, and for the illustrated papers. They must come down to Barnstaple when they could and stay with her. The country air would put roses into Eleanor's cheeks. Meanwhile she would be sure to remember them to all old friends, and would tell Miss Maxwell, of Tristow, how wonderfully Eleanor had been getting on. And then the guard blew his whistle, and she called more last words to them out of the window, waving a black-gloved hand, until the train steamed out of sight.

Then Walter looked at Eleanor with a glint of laughter in his eyes, and spoke:

"Well, Eleanor!"

"Well, Walter!"

"We've both grown up a little since we left Barnstaple, I think."

For all her wish to simplify herself, she felt no motive to deny it.

And yet she was not happy, for there was still no love in his speech, but only the *camaraderie* which discontented her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENT.

SO Mrs. Bryant went back again to Barnstaple, and three days afterwards forwarded her thank-offering,—those two pounds of Devonshire cream, carefully packed in a coffee tin, with a protecting buffer of bread-crumb ; and all that Eleanor had learnt from her was that simplicity and provincialism were very different things. But what simplicity was, and how she might attain to it, were still riddles to which she knew no answer. She learnt more about it, a little later, at Lily Marston's wedding.

It was a curious gathering—a meeting of two worlds that did not often meet, unless it were by accident, sometimes, at Lady Brent's. The bridegroom was supported by smart cavalry officers, who interlarded their talk with many " doncher knows," and by smart women of the class to which lawn-tennis is greater than the arts. The friends of the bride were the members of the Pioneer Club, and

the writers and painters of the flats and studios of Kensington and Chelsea. The two sets mixed amiably in a suite of rooms in a private hotel in Albemarle Street, which Mrs. Brereton had hired for the reception, and the ladies on both sides took many mental notes for the subsequent criticism of each other's hats and frocks.

As for the ceremony itself, in which the Reverend Paul Devine assisted a Colonial Bishop, it was, so to speak, the solemn transfer of Lily Marston from the one world to the other,—from the world where a woman is eccentric if she does not live her own life, to the world where she is eccentric if she does.

"The rescue of Lily Marston," Mr. Pyne called it, threatening to paint a subject picture with that title ; and one of the cavalry officers tried to revive his recollections of mythology in order to put the sentiment more picturesquely.

"Reminds one of that fellow in the classics," he said, "delivering what-'s-her-name from the dragon."

"Come now, that is n't fair," replied his companion. "Mrs. Brereton 's rather a fine looking woman for a dragon."

"A very good dragon as dragon cats go," hummed the other. "I daresay you 're right.

But then very likely the dragon in the story was good looking enough; but all the same it was a good thing for what-'s-her-name to be taken away from him."

That was the general sentiment, even with those guests who were less familiar than the cavalry officer with the story of Perseus and Andromeda. Some thought of the same order was in Eleanor's mind when she offered her congratulations.

The crush was thinning at the time, and she was admiring the necklace of pearls and chrysolite which was Captain Armitage's wedding present to the bride.

"I am so glad, dear," she said, "to see you look so happy."

Lily Marston blushed becomingly.

"I am very happy, Mrs. Temple. He is so good to me," she answered. "Only I don't understand why he is so fond of me, when I know I am so silly."

A little tribute this to Mrs. Temple's talents, and Eleanor smiled, perceiving it. But she continued, with a touch of sadness in her sympathy.

"Yes, dear, and I think you will be always happy. You have n't got the artistic temperament to trouble you."

The remark appeared irrelevant. Lily was puz-

zled, and in spite of the kindness of the voice, suspected lurking sarcasm.

"I know I 'm not clever, Mrs. Temple, if that 's what you mean," she said,—"not clever as my aunt is, and as you are. Fred says he does n't want me to be clever."

But that, of course, was not at all what Eleanor had meant, and the answer that she made still left Lily Armitage wondering.

"He 's quite right, dear," she said. "Only it 's a kind of cleverness, you know, to have got the sort of temperament that makes life easiest. Lots of your friends whom you envy because you think them clever would be glad enough to change their temperaments for yours."

Then she began to be afraid of being misunderstood—or of being understood, which would be worse—and changed the subject, talking of Paris where Lily was to begin her honeymoon, and of Nice and Monte Carlo which she was to visit afterwards.

But her thoughts were not diverted. The mystery of happiness—the wanton way in which it refused its blessings to the finer natures, and gave them to the weaker and less sensitively organised—continued to occupy her mind; and presently she found the opportunity of coming back to it again.

This was a little later, after the bride and bridegroom had got into their brougham, and driven off to Victoria with the tell-tale rice upon the roof.

For the members of the Pioneer Club threw rice just as Mrs. Bryant and Miss Maxwell and Mr. Alfred Fletcher and Mr. Richard Wantage had thrown it on Eleanor's wedding day at Barnstaple, albeit with somewhat less life and energy, and somewhat more self-consciousness and dignity; and Eleanor's mind was drawn back irresistibly to that great and solemn day in her own life.

Even on that day she had never quite risen to Lily's high hopes of an exalted happiness. Yet she had been happy after a fashion and had expected to grow happier as the months rolled on. She had not understood then what an artistic temperament meant, or how it might come to clash with other things of more importance. But she understood now, and envied Lily Armitage.

As the carriage drove off in the dust and the sunshine, and the waving of hands and handkerchiefs ceased, and the anti-climax of banal talk began, she sighed, and said wearily to Duncan Deane, who stood behind her:

"Lucky girl! She 's taken away from us before we 've had time to spoil her."

"To spoil her, Mrs. Temple?"

"Yes, to spoil her, by giving her an artistic temperament, and telling her to live her own life, and all that sort of thing."

"I rather expect Mrs. Brereton did tell her something of that kind," Duncan Deane protested.

"Perhaps. But she was wise and did n't listen, and she 's happier so. Don't you agree, Mr. Deane, that she is probably happier without an artistic temperament?"

She intended no revelation of her private feelings; she tried to guard against it by a careless inflection of her voice. But, as though he had understood more than he was meant to understand, he took the question very seriously.

They had drifted back, by this time, into one of the reception rooms, and while other people drank tea or claret cup at the buffet, or took a last survey of the wedding presents before they said good-bye, she sat in the corner of a divan, and he stood in front of her, and expounded with a vigour that recalled his first conversation with her about the worthlessness of art at Stornoway's "At Home."

"The artistic temperament, Mrs. Temple!" he repeated. "Do you know, I sometimes think that, while, for a man, the artistic temperament is bad enough, it must be hell and damnation for a woman."

The words were strong, but Duncan Deane was in the habit of expressing himself strongly. The reviewers of his books used to say that, when he was most convincing, he convinced you with a sledge-hammer, and there was often that in his conversation which merited the same remark.

Eleanor answered with a question that encouraged him to go on haranguing.

"And yet, sometimes the most matter of fact women are unhappy, Mr. Deane. They may be poor; they may have to earn their own living, they may have children who turn out badly, or husbands who drink, or who are cruel to them. Do you mean that they are less sensitive, and so feel their troubles less?"

"I mean that partly, Mrs. Temple. But I also mean something more than that."

"Yes?"

"Things of that sort are accidents, you know, and only come into a stray life here and there. The wretchedness of the artistic temperament is of its essence. It works out with the irresistible precision of a law of logic."

"Particularly in the case of women?"

"Particularly in the case of women. It is as though nature had never expected a woman with

an artistic temperament, and had prepared no place for her in the scheme of things."

"You speak cruelly, Mr. Deane."

"I am trying to speak truly, Mrs. Temple. And it seems to me that the root of the matter is just this: that a woman, just because she is a woman, and feels that she is weak even when she is trying to persuade herself that she is strong, cannot bear to live alone; and that a woman with an artistic temperament, just because of that artistic temperament is condemned to live alone."

It was exactly the truth to which she had been slowly feeling her own way; and it was as though Duncan Deane explained her to herself, as he continued.

"Now and again such a woman may meet a man who is able to penetrate beneath the surface, who will teach her that art is nothing, and that the human affections—the communion of soul with soul—are the things in life that really matter. Such a man and such a woman may then find their happiness together."

She might have found a personal meaning in his words if she had chosen. But she did not choose, and he went on,

"But that is rare, you know, and sometimes

only happens to the woman after she is married. Then—"

"Then, Mr. Deane, it can only make fresh trouble for her."

He might have argued that point also, if he had been encouraged ; but she kept him to his theme by adding,

"And never mind the exceptions, Mr. Deane. Tell me about the rule."

"The rule ? Well, the rule is almost like a scientific formula. You see—putting the exception on one side—the men whom our imaginary woman with the artistic temperament will meet fall into two classes. There will be the clever men, and there will be the stupid men. The stupid men may admire her, but they can't make her happy, because she despises them too much, to let them try. That's true, I think ?"

"Perhaps. And the clever men ?"

"The clever men will be afraid of her—jealous of her temperament—fearful of its clashing with their own ; and so she is a cleft stick, so to speak, and doomed to unhappiness in either case. That's why I say that while the artistic temperament is bad enough for a man, it must be hell and damnation for a woman."

It was a hard saying, and she could not but exclaim against it, though she tried to do so playfully, and as if her interest in the argument was quite impersonal.

"Poor women! They don't choose their temperament. They 're born with them, and they can't get rid of them. You don't know of any way, do you, Mr. Deane?—by which a woman can get rid of an artistic temperament?"

He did not echo her pretence to treat the question playfully. He was in earnest—as always—fearfully and terribly in earnest.

"There is one thing only," he said, "which breaks down the artistic temperament as surely as a cannon ball will batter down a wooden palisade. One thing only, and that one thing is contact with the actualities of life."

He went on to illustrate his meaning.

"You 've read those stories in the papers, of the Europeans who were captured by the Arabs in Hicks Pasha's expedition, and came back, the other day, to Cairo, after they had spent ten years under the whip of the slave driver in the Soudan. Can you imagine one of those men suffering from an artistic temperament after his escape? It seems absurd—does n't it—even to speak of such a thing? Yet that is only the extreme instance,

picked to make the truth stand out most clearly. It is easy to find others such as might happen to any one of us. Take the case of the man who has fought the battle of life in a new country, who has starved, as I did for a whole winter once, in San Francisco, who has been bullied by policemen and gone to bed at night on the floor of common lodging-houses without knowing where his next morning's breakfast was to come from. Take the case of the Sister of Charity who spends her days visiting the sick and dying in the slums, where the drunkards pawn their blankets to buy gin, and the little children cry for food. Do you think that such a man or such a woman knows what the artistic temperament means? Or the man who has a great passion in his life—a hopeless passion—but a passion that still clings to him even though he knows it to be hopeless. Will an artistic temperament trouble such a man as that? Hardly. He has touched the actualities of life too closely, and the actualities have scattered any artistic temperament that he may have ever had. Yes, Mrs. Temple, you may take my word for it, it is the hard, bitter actualities of life, that break down the artistic temperament and reveal the real, simple unsophisticated human nature that is buried away beneath it."

The discussion ended there. Or rather she only said thoughtfully,

"I wonder."

And he answered positively,

"You wonder? Well, I for my part am quite sure. Think of it, and then you will agree with me."

Then they separated, and, seeing that the company was dwindling fast, Eleanor said good-bye to Mrs. Brereton, and drove back to Kensington, and dressed, and dined, and went with her husband to a first night at the Gaiety, and tried to yield herself to sensuous enjoyment, and be amused by what she saw there. Afterwards, when she was in her bedroom alone, she pondered, following the train of thought that Duncan Deane's long speech had indicated.

She was not at all sure that he was right—not at all sure that, to the artistic temperament, anything should or could be more actual than its own creations. The society in which she had mostly lived of late denied it; and it was hard for her to revolt against the wisdom of her teachers, even when her own instinct whispered to her that they were wrong.

Moreover, if a great passion were an actuality, then surely she had touched the actualities herself,

and they had failed to tame her—failed to simplify her, as she had hoped. Her artistic temperament—she was sure it was her artistic temperament—still stood between her and the love she wished to win. And this other woman—this dancing girl who had won the love she wanted—what could she ever have known of the bitter actualities of life? Nothing. In such a life as hers there could be nothing but glamour, and gaslight, and artificiality. Where, then, was the magic power that Duncan Deane declared that the actualities would have for her?

There was a confusion of ideas in her meditation; but she did not perceive it. She forgot that, to some people simplicity was natural, while by others it could only be acquired if at all by suffering, and pain, and rude experience; and she went on reasoning with herself.

"And yet there are other actualities—others that he spoke of, and that I have never known."

There was one actuality, indeed, which she did not think of, or thought of only for a passing moment—the actuality that may absorb a woman when she is the mother of a child. They had been married so long, and had not had a child. Childless marriages were so common in her little world. When there were children they counted for so little

in the artistic life; and when there were none there were so many other things to think about that they were hardly missed. So to Eleanor just as to Mrs. Brereton and Mrs. Belbrooke, the thought of marriage hardly suggested any thought of children. If ever she wished for them, it was only a passing emotion that did not occupy her long; and if it was stronger every time that it returned to her, it had gathered no overwhelming strength as yet.

But there were other actualities—actualities that she was free to face at any moment if she chose. She thought of these.

"At least I can do something, work among the poor, help them in their misery, learn to understand what they tell me are the real troubles of human life. Perhaps that would help me—teach me to simplify myself—to trample down my pride—to subdue the temperament that stands like a barrier between my soul and Walter's. I wonder."

There was no conviction in the thought. It merely seemed an experiment worth trying. She would merely go to it in the spirit of the invalid, who seeks a new quack nostrum after the ordinary remedies have failed. Yet she would try, so that she might not reproach herself afterwards with having left anything untried.

Her friends would be surprised; her husband would not understand. Some people would laugh and there would probably be misleading paragraphs in the literary papers. It was a new thing for a woman who wrote sex-problem novels to give herself suddenly to good works in filthy courts and alleys. It would be said that she did it to advertise herself, or that she was collecting materials for some new literary work. Interviewers would call. Stornoway would write an article about it. No matter. She would try the experiment, all the same, and if it succeeded Walter would understand and love her for it.

As for the means of beginning, these, she knew, were ready to her hand. Her old friend, the Rev. Paul Devine, would tell her what to do. He must need helpers badly in his poor parish in Soho, and he would hardly cross-examine her about her motives, or press her too severely on the point of orthodoxy. He was not so High Church now as when he was in Barnstaple. So she would go to him.

"I'll write to-morrow," she said, "and tell him that I'm coming to call on him on Thursday afternoon."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEAMY SIDE.

THE Rev. Paul Devine lived in a flat on the fourth floor of a house in the Charing-Cross Road.

It was a sufficiently Bohemian situation for a clergyman. His next-door neighbour, for example was a serio of the Music Halls, who sometimes assisted him in organising charitable entertainments, and sometimes gave midnight supper parties which ended in the throwing of soda-water bottles out of window at the lamp-posts. The other ladies whom he was apt to meet, at various hours, upon the staircase, had not at all the air of district visitors. But, by way of compensation, there was a bath-room.

"It is the nearest bathroom to my sphere of spiritual usefulness," he told his friends; and his friends seeing how spiritual usefulness in Soho tended to premature baldness, agreed that it deserved to be encouraged by a bathroom.

It was also encouraged, as no doubt it also deserved to be encouraged, by certain modest luxuries—by deep and comfortable armchairs, by Japanese screens and a rosewood pianette, by a few of Mr. Pyne's water-colour drawings, and by a library that was not wholly theological, but also contained many of the works of the worldly writers who were to be met at Stornoway's. In spite of the ivory crucifix that hung conspicuously over the fire place, Paul Devine evidently was not quite so High Church as he had been at Barnstaple,—a fact which Eleanor remarked with satisfaction.

"You are surprised to see me, Mr. Devine?" she asked, after they had shaken hands.

"You said that you were coming to see me on business," he replied, "and of course I wondered what the business was."

Then, without any preliminary skirmishing, she told him. She wanted to work among the poor. She had come to him to ask him to find her the opportunity, and show her how she could begin.

"You are in earnest? You really mean that, Mrs. Temple?"

He could not help the exclamation. Her appearance alone would have been enough to draw it from him. In her large straw hat with branching feathers, her rich gown shot with crimson silk,

her exaggerated sleeves puffed out in balloons, and with her violet eyes peeping out under the clusters of her auburn hair, she looked, though in a different way, as little like a district visitor as any of the other ladies who more usually passed up and down the stairs of Durham Mansions. It seemed almost droll that she should seek for work among the poor. He would as soon have expected his friend, the Music Hall artiste, to ask for it.

But Eleanor was quite in earnest.

"Of course I mean it, Mr. Devine," she answered. "You need n't be afraid that I have come here to waste your time. Please tell me of something that I can do."

It was a great surprise for him—almost a shock. He remembered that day, some seven years before, when he had asked her to marry him, as they walked home together from the picnic in the woods at Barnstaple. To do good works together—that was the picture which he had sketched for her then with all his young enthusiasm; and good works had seemed prosaic and commonplace to her. Since then, she had been living in a circle where good works, in the technical sense, were only known by hearsay, and "conversions" in the technical sense, did not take place. The sudden change seemed, therefore, unaccountable.

And what sort of work was it that she wanted? He hazarded a suggestion timidly.

"We have concerts for the working people, every Saturday, in the Parish Hall. It helps to keep them away from the public-house, you know. Perhaps you would come and sing, or recite for us, sometimes. You would be very useful."

It was the compromise he usually found for ladies of fashion who wanted in some vague way to do good without putting themselves to inconvenience; and it was a fresh surprise to him when Eleanor objected,—

"I don't mean that, Mr. Devine. That 's only playing at charity. I want you to give me some harder work than that, to send me out in the real misery of the courts and slums. One is used to live so artificially down in Kensington. One knows nothing of the cruel realities of life; and I—well, I want to know about them. I 'll try to help the poor if you let me."

He still misjudged her, as it was inevitable that he should; he fancied that she only wanted to study this misery in order that she might write about it; he doubted whether he ought not to send her away, refusing her request. And yet he could not make himself do that. Had it not been the first and last romantic thought in his own life that

he and she should go out into the miserable places of the world, and serve God's poor together? And now that she came to him, from whatever motive, asking him to guide and direct her in the paths of charity it seemed to be in some dim and shadowy sense a realisation of his dream. It was less than he had dared to hope for once; but at least it held out a promise of happiness which he was too human to pass by.

"I don't know," he began doubtfully, "whether I ought to ask you to take a class in the Sunday-School."

"Something more useful—I mean to say something harder—than that, please, Mr. Devine," she interposed.

"But I've no doubt I can find work for you. Give me a day or two to talk it over with my vicar, Mr. Fenwick, and I'll write to you."

So it was arranged. The Rev. Oliver Fenwick was consulted, and Eleanor was introduced to him.

She liked him—liked him the better, perhaps, because his mind and hers were as the poles apart.

He was a stately, simple, silver-haired old gentleman, whose face was worn and wrinkled by many years of faithful service in the unsavoury quarters of great cities; and he took Eleanor quite seriously, showing no embarrassing suspicion as to

the motive which impelled her to come to him and ask for Christian work. What motive should she have except the desire to serve their common Master? Certainly, no more complex reason was likely to occur to him.

"Mr. Devine tells me that you don't care to take a class in the Sunday-School," he said. "Perhaps you are right. Our children are n't so unruly as some; but still it needs experience and a strong hand to manage them. However, there is plenty of other work that you can do. We 'll make you useful, Mrs. Temple. You need n't be afraid of that. There are the mothers' meetings, and there 's a club that we are getting up for the working girls. Come and help us to amuse them; they 've no idea of amusing themselves when they can't walk about the streets with young men. Besides that, I 'll give you a district if you care to have one."

"I shall be glad to have a district," Eleanor replied, and Mr. Fenwick went on to give her good advice to guide her when she went to it.

She was to be careful not to intrude herself on the poor on washing-day, or at their dinner-time. She must not ask the wives too bluntly whether their husbands drank, but must draw the information from them gently. She must not believe every story of distress she heard, but must make enqui-

ries carefully, remembering that it was seldom the people who made the most parade of their sufferings who really suffered most. And so forth, just as he would have counselled any other neophyte whom he was initiating into parish work.

Thus Eleanor's experiment began, and she learnt to know more of vice and misery in a month, than she had ever guessed in all her previous life.

She had fancied that her husband might object to her strange doings; but he did not. At all events, such objections as he raised were quickly overcome.

"Are you sure there is no danger for you, Eleanor?" he urged at first.

"Mr. Devine and Mr. Fenwick tell me there is none," she answered. "The poor don't molest the people who only come among them for their good."

"Still," he protested, "there may be danger of disease. There 's always some sort of fever flying about in these filthy places. It 's better to be careful."

To this, too, she had an answer ready.

"Plenty of other people go about the slums—the clergy, the doctors, the nurses. If they don't catch fevers why should I be frightened?"

Then he yielded. It was his habit to let her have her way in most things. She was clever, and

if this was her notion of living her own life, he would not try to interfere with her.

But he misunderstood her, just as Mr. Devine had misunderstood her.

"I daresay you 'll find some good 'copy' there, Eleanor," he said.

"It is n't 'copy' that I 'm looking for, this time, Walter," she replied; but he was sceptical and it was not yet the time for her to tell him what deeper purpose she had in visiting and succouring the destitute.

Still less could she explain her motives to inquisitive friends. There was Mrs. Belbrooke, for example, who asked her point-blank whether she liked common people.

"I am trying to like them," Eleanor replied, and Mrs. Belbrooke rattled off some friendly cynicism.

"Well, my dear, I must say it 's very nice and candid of you to put it like that. Some women pretend to like common people; but I 'm quite convinced it 's only a pose. Some people even pretend that they 're more virtuous than we are; but the fact remains that they get into the Police Courts a great deal of times. Still, no doubt, they 're interesting to write about, because they 're so delightfully unconventional. I must tell Mr.

Stornoway what you're doing, and then you'll get some paragraphs!"

"No, please don't do that," Eleanor said; and Mrs. Belbrooke refrained.

But other people were not so scrupulous; and Eleanor's visit to the slums soon began to make "copy" for somebody if not for her.

One saw, for instance, the hand of Stornoway in this excerpt from a certain minor literary organ:—

"Every day, realism becomes more and more the fashion with our fictionists, and the 'Human document' is more than ever in request. M. Zola, as is well known, never sits down to write a novel until he has first filled many note-books with his *pièces justificatives;* and our English novelists are fast beginning to follow his example. Mrs. Temple, for instance, whose psychological romance, *A Human Exotic*, recently excited much attention, is at present busily collecting materials for a fresh work in the purlieus of Soho, where her assiduous works of charity have already made her a great favourite with the poor."

On the heels of that paragraph there followed another of a more personal character in which the hand of Stornoway was equally apparent:—

"Mrs. Temple, who is a frequent figure at London literary gatherings, is a surprisingly young-looking woman to have achieved such a remarkable success in fiction. With her thick auburn hair half hiding her broad and thoughtful brow, and her dreamy eyes with their drooping silky eyelashes, hers is just the face that an artist of the Rossetti School would most delight to paint. It has been painted, indeed, by her husband, the well-known artist, one of whose pictures was last year bought by the trustees of the Chantry Bequest."

That is how people gossiped, and Eleanor was obliged to let them gossip. But her own aim was clear;—she would draw closer to the actualities of life, would master the lesson which she had been told that they contained for her, would lose her self-consciousness in their own overpowering presence, and so would simplify herself. She spared no pains, but pursued her task with feverish eagerness.

In truth, the realities were terrible enough. There is always more of vice than of actual poverty in Soho. But there was enough of both, and as Eleanor was unused to either it appeared to her that a panorama of perpetual horrors passed

before her eyes. She saw most kinds of human misery; and what she did not see, some clever claimant to her charity was always careful to invent for her. The tale of the wife whose husband squandered his wages in the gin palace, and reeled home at closing time to beat her if she complained; the tale of the husband who could get no work but lived on the few shillings that his wife earned by charing; the tale of the children who were sent out into the streets in rags to beg; the tale of the old people who had to break up their garret homes and go into the workhouse because they had no means of earning half a crown a week; the tale of the Magdalen who would have liked to repent and live honestly, but knew no honest trade; the tale of the Magdalen who had grown old and withered in her shame, and now only pleaded for pence that she might buy gin and drink herself ingloriously to death. All these were poured into Eleanor's ears, day after day, as she made her charitable pilgrimage through the narrow courts and alleys of Soho.

At first she shrank from the sight of so much wretchedness—a wretchedness that had too often been expressly staged for her—just as she would have shrunk from the sight of blood, or from the sight of a spider in her bedroom. It shocked her

the more because it was not for the poor's sake, but for her own that she encountered it,—no glorious sense of duty impelling, cheering, and sustaining her.

But that was her secret which she told to no one and she fought with her repugnance, as the invalid forces herself to take a bitter medicine, gradually inuring herself to dirt and dreadful sights, spending her pin-money on impostors who took it as their due, visiting the bedsides of the sick, and doing perhaps not much less good than if to do good had been the only purpose of her self-denial.

She was not strong, and after awhile her ceaseless energy began to tell upon her health. She looked pale, and both Mr. Devine and the Vicar urged her not to work so hard.

"Economise your energies, Mrs. Temple," Mr. Fenwick said. "We can't afford to have our most useful helpers getting themselves laid up."

But Eleanor protested that she was very well, that her paleness did not signify, because, all her life, she had looked a little pale, and that the people would miss her if she came to them less often, and so continued to move as a ministering angel among her poor, and show them kindness under false pretences.

It was a very happy time for Paul Devine,—a time of constant sunshine in a tedious life. For all his high ideals, parish work was apt to grow wearisome to him when it was only brightened by the cheering consciousness of duty done. But with Eleanor Temple joining in his labours and meeting him daily at one of the parish halls or clubs, reporting cases of distress that she had found, and asking his help or his advice in dealing with them, parish work was a perpetual joy.

He repented of his first harsh judgment of her motives. Her untiring diligence clearly proved that it was wrong. The artist's desire to study a new local colour no more accounted for such self-sacrificing perseverance than idle curiosity could have accounted for it. She must have some different if not some higher reason for doing as she did. A religious reason? A desire to serve Christ through the service of His little ones? He would have liked to think so, but he hardly dared. For her speech was free, as it had always been, of all religious phrase or reference; and he had an intuitive sense that she would be no more pleased to hear him talk theology than Stornoway would be pleased if he offered to read prayers at one of his "At Homes."

What then? Was she unhappy? Had she some

private trouble of which she did not speak, and was her charity a desperate device to help her to forget it? He had known such cases, and it seemed a more reasonable theory than any other.

But, after all, there was no use in theorising, for her reasons did not matter to him. It was enough to know that he and she were labouring together, enough to live like a man in a dream imagining that what might have been had actually come to pass. Presently, perhaps, she would explain herself. But he would not press her for the explanation now, for fear lest the explanation might dissolve the dream.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NO NEARER THE GOAL.

BUT Eleanor did not explain herself in any way that the Reverend Paul Devine could understand. If the suddenness of her devotion to good works had puzzled him at first, he found her subsequent abandonment of them equally surprising.

She had dropped hints, indeed, before the crisis came—hints that might have told him that the workings of her complex, high-strung nature were beyond, if not above, his range.

"I feel horribly ashamed of myself, sometimes, Mr. Devine," she said, "when I go home after an afternoon spent in these miserable places."

He misjudged her meaning, as she had expected that he would, and as he nearly always did.

"Ashamed because you leave these people to their discomfort while you go home to luxury? But there is no reason to be ashamed of that. Surely it is the luxury, and the relief you get from

it, that gives you the strength and energy to work so hard, to be so useful to those who have no luxury."

It was the argument with which he had fortified himself when he had mixed with the Bohemians. He felt that it was a sound argument; and surely it applied with even more force to her case than to his.

But she corrected him.

"I don't mean that," she said. "It is n't the luxury that I 'm ashamed of. I don't think I enjoy my luxuries quite enough for that. What I 'm ashamed of is the point of view from which I find myself looking at these people's sufferings."

"The point of view!" he slowly repeated in his perplexity.

"Yes, Mr. Devine, the point of view. I see it all too much as an artist, and too little as a human sympathiser."

"You wrong yourself, Mrs. Temple."

"No, no, I don't. I know myself a good deal better than you know me. Of course I 'm sorry for the people. One is always sorry for anyone who suffers. But I don't feel that they are my brothers and sisters, as you do, I suppose, and as Mr. Fenwick does, and as those good women do who give up everything to spend all their lives among the poor. I seem to be looking at the life

from the outside—like Flaubert, you know—so that what I see is only a picture, and what I feel is only a drama in which I have no part to play. Do you know, I could go home and write a book about these people, and when I had written it, never think of them again! That is n't the temper in which one ought to set about work among the poor."

"I don't think it is the temper in which you do go about it, either, Mrs. Temple," he protested gently. "You have overworked yourself and grown a little morbid. That is all."

Morbid! The word distressed her. Why did people always insist that she was morbid whenever she was most anxious to be human?

"Ah! but I tell you it is my temper," she replied; "and if you say it is a morbid temper, well then, I am afraid it is my nature to be morbid. I thought people were only morbid when they lived artificial lives, and that the realities of life, such as one sees here, were sure to cure them. But, it seems, it is n't so."

It was a train of thought that Paul Devine could only follow at a distance; and even if he could have entered into it as some men might, it would only have revealed a portion of the workings of Eleanor Temple's mind.

For the truth was—what she did not dare to tell him—that it was beginning to be borne in upon her, more and more, that her mission to the poor had failed. Their lives might be the brighter and happier for her presence, as their pockets were certainly the fuller. But it was not for their sake but for her own that she had come among them. She had fancied that the spectacle of their gross material sorrows would break the pride of her own heart, would kill that "artistic temperament" that she wanted to be rid of, would quicken those simple human instincts which she believed would make her more desirable to Walter; and now she was conscious that they had not done so. Why? Well, perhaps for the same reason for which the faith cure can do nothing for those who have no faith, and the unbeliever can get no good at Lourdes,—because she watched the charm so critically that it never had the chance to work its wonders. At any rate the fact remained that in the presence of the actualities she felt herself an artist still. As she had said, she only saw them as a picture, and only felt them as a drama that called for an artist to present it worthily.

But that was a little matter. The real trouble was that whether for this reason or for another, she believed that she was no nearer to Walter's

heart than she had been before her strange experiment began. There still seemed to be the same intangible barrier between them—the barrier across which they might shake hands as friends, but could not kiss as lovers.

It was a barrier, indeed, that appeared to her to be growing rather than decreasing.

She felt it so one day when he asked her whether she had n't nearly finished her studies of low life—a cruel question, showing clearly that, for him, in spite of all her efforts, she was still the sister artist rather than the woman craving to be loved.

"Why, Walter?" she asked.

"Because, my dear, I think you 're overdoing it. You go up to those miserable slums every day of your life, and you come home in the evening almost too tired to talk."

"Of course, if you don't like it, Walter," she began.

"It is n't that I don't like it, but that I don't think it 's very good for you," he replied. "You are n't very strong, and I 'm afraid of your making yourself ill. Look at yourself in the glass. You 're quite pale, and you 've got dark rings under your eyes,"

She rose and stood in front of the mirror, and as she did it, was conscious of a certain languor in

her movement, which showed her that he was right, and that her strength had suffered from the hard work in an unhealthy neighbourhood. She had noticed it before, indeed. Her old neuralgic troubles had returned to her, and once or twice she had flown to the morphine for relief. But now she perceived that her features had a drawn and tired look, and she fancied that she saw a beginning of crowsfeet at the corners of her eyes.

"You don't look so pretty, you know, when you work so hard," Walter added with an effort at playfulness, looking up at her from his armchair.

The words hurt her, though they were spoken in perfect kindness, and merely as an argument to support his wish that she should be more careful of her health. They started a full flood of fresh reflections.

She had worked so hard to make herself the simple woman that he could love; and this was the result, that she was beginning to lose even the little hold that she might have had on him by reason of her beauty. Could anything be more cruelly perverse? If she could not move his heart when she was beautiful, then surely she must fail to touch it when she was ugly—old and ugly—and he could tell her so, carelessly, as though it were a matter of no particular concern to him.

Those were her first thoughts—unreasonable thoughts; and a moment afterwards she knew they were unreasonable, knew that her husband had spoken idly, and without any such meaning as her frightened fancy had put upon his speech.

Her anger vanished, and she tried to call coquetry to her aid—the coquetry which had always been so hard for her, because it had jarred upon her sense of dignity, but which she still believed would conquer him if she could learn it.

"Then you want me to look pretty, Walter? You would n't care for me if I were ugly?"

It was a feeble effort; and she was quite aware that it was feeble. She was too ill, as well as too upset to be coquettish in the way that piques a man, who does not look for coquetry, and it hardly surprised her that he missed the opportunity she gave him. In fact he scarcely seemed to be aware of it.

"But of course I like you to look pretty, Eleanor," he answered, and then added, after a second's pause,

"But it 's even more important, you know, that you should be looking well."

Better to look well than pretty? Perhaps. But would a lover say so. No, the speech showed her clearly what a gulf there lay between his soul and

hers. But something moved her to go on—to try and show him something of what was and had been passing in her mind.

"You like me better when I'm pretty, Walter. I wonder whether you'd like me better if I were simple."

"If you were simple?"

A puzzled smile played on his lips as he caught up the words from her.

"Yes, if I were simple. Don't think me conceited, Walter, but I've sometimes felt that I was too clever, too complex, and that you did n't like it—that you'd like me better if I were simpler, if I cared less about art and all that sort of thing."

He protested, just as he had protested once before when she had spoken similarly, rising from his chair, and coming nearer to her:

"But you know how proud I've always been, Eleanor, when you have succeeded in your art."

"I know, I know, and I thank you for it very much. But you see of late I've wanted something more than that, and I thought that perhaps you'd care more for me if I were a simple woman; and then I thought that, if I went among the poor, where life is so terribly hard and real, I could crush all the art out of myself, and forget how to

be morbid, as I know I am sometimes, and teach myself to be simple, just as other women are."

She had never expected to be able to confess so much; but when once she began to speak the mere act of speech inspired her, and one sentence grew out of another until she had almost told him all.

And when he answered, it was to cut her confession short with kindly raillery. For he had long since given up expecting her to love him; his life had arranged itself so that he did not need her love; and now, it only embarrassed him to hear her talk like that. It would have been different three years before. But now it was too late, and raillery seemed the only weapon to save the situation.

"And so, you silly child, you spend your time walking about those filthy Soho slums until you are quite pale and tired and ill."

"But I wanted so much to learn how to be simple, Walter."

He smiled again—it was not a mocking, but an incredulous and puzzled smile—as he replied:

"You simple, Eleanor? As if you could learn how to be simple, however much you tried!"

And added, with a sort of sympathy in his voice, and as though he were really sorry to see her wanting something that she could not have—

"Why, you might as well try not to have beautiful eyes. One is as one is made, you know, and fighting against nature is as immoral as dyeing one's hair."

Then she was quite sure that he either could not or would not understand, and ceased to argue with him.

Yet the talk, abortive though it had been in one sense, had had its influence on her. It had convinced her that her work among the poor was idle waste of time, advancing her no more than the burning of her psychological novel had advanced her, no more than Mrs. Bryant's visit to London had advanced her. And as she had never valued it for its own sake, she would leave it.

There were no cherished ties to sever. It gave her no more pain to leave Soho than it had given her to leave the Pioneer Club; and she made no attempt to hide the fact when she spoke of her intention to Paul Devine.

She thought that perhaps he would despise her for it. It mattered very little to her if he did. In his eyes, at all events, she had no desire to play the hypocrite, or to figure as something different from what she was. Perhaps too, she admitted, she deserved to be despised. To turn back suddenly, and as it must seem unreasonably, from a

service which she had deliberately sought—to leave a gap without caring whether there was any-one to fill it—that certainly was not heroic, and to a clergyman, might well appear contemptible. A clergyman could hardly be expected to understand enough to make allowances.

And Mr. Fenwick certainly made none; but said harsh things, after she had disappeared, about the idle caprices of fashionable women who took up charity as they took up a new kind of fancy work, and tired of it as easily. But Paul Devine did not reproach her. Being human, and having eyes to see that she was beautiful, he could not; and on the sad day when she told him what she had determined, it was his own loss, and not the loss that his poor would feel, that filled his mind, for his loss, he felt was far the greater of the two.

They were in one of the little rooms that opened out of the Parish Hall,—a shabby little room, without a carpet, and with no furniture except a deal table, and three rush-bottomed chairs. It served as a green-room on the occasion of the Saturday night concerts; tea was prepared there for the Sunday-School children's treats; the sub-scribers to the penny bank brought their deposits there. It was, in short, a kind of office where all varieties of parish business were transacted. The

voices of costermongers, crying their fruit and vegetables, were heard faintly through the fastened window, and through the closed door came a sound of scrubbing from the char-woman who was polishing the floor.

Without preamble, without even the semblance of embarrassment, Eleanor told Paul Devine her errand.

"I 'm sorry, Mr. Devine, but I find that I have to give up this parish work."

He did not at once grasp the full force of what she said, supposing merely that she felt ill, and wished to give herself a holiday. He answered upon that assumption.

"I see you 're overworked, Mrs. Temple, and a little rest and change will do you good. But you don't mean that we are to lose you altogether?"

"Yes, altogether."

The answer hurt him like a blow. It seemed so cruel, that she should have brought the sunshine into his life, only to take it away from him so soon. Before, he had schooled himself not to miss the sunshine; but now the shadows would be colder and darker than they had ever been. But he could not speak to her of that. But on the other hand he could not bring himself to discourse solemnly to her about her duty as his vicar might have done.

"The poor people here will miss you terribly," was all that he could urge.

But she was deaf to the appeal.

"I knew you'd think me capricious," she replied. "It reminds you of the Bible—does n't it?—of that passage about people putting their hands to the plough, and then turning back. And yet I'm going to turn back, and I'm not going to give you any reason. I have n't any reason that you would understand."

Certainly she was capricious; and if Paul Devine had been wise enough and strong enough, there were many home truths that he might have spoken. He might have preached her a sermon on that text, "the things that matter"—might have told her that useful work always mattered, whatever else did not—and so arguing, might have prevailed. But he was in far too human a mood to take that tone with her.

"I can't imagine that you would act without a reason, Mrs. Temple," was all he dared to say.

"Without a reason? No. But for what to you would seem an absurd and wicked reason. Suppose I tell you that I have found out that self-denial interferes with my own life as I want to live it; that my own life is more to me than other people's lives; that I see that the women who give

up their lives to charity grow dull and spiritless and unattractive, like the Sunday-School teachers whom I meet here sometimes, and that I prefer the old artificial life that I have been used to live."

The speech rang out like a bitter defiance of the sacred principles of the Christian religion. It pained him ; and he knew that, at this moment, he ought to drop the man, and to assume the priest. But he could not. He was still too human to be angry with her. For he felt that he too, at a crisis, with his own happiness at stake, might be false to the Christian precepts of self-sacrifice. Nay, more. He felt even now that his sorrow at losing her in his Parish was essentially a selfish sorrow—a sorrow for the dissolution of the dream in which he had been living for so many weeks.

"So good-bye, Mr. Devine. We part good friends, I hope," Eleanor said, holding out her hand.

He took it, and then his human instincts overcame him, and the intolerable sense of his desolation filled his mind, and his sudden utterance was like a cry of pain.

"I can't bear it. I can't bear to let you go like that. You think it is only because of the good work you do that I want to have you here. No, it is for your own sake, because of the sunshine you

bring with you, because when you are with me I am reminded of a hope I once had, ever so long ago, because I still— "

But the look she gave him checked him before he said the compromising word. He stopped less because he remembered that it was wrong than because he saw that it was hopeless.

" Forgive me ! I forgot myself. I have no right to speak to you like that. Only it is hard always to be strong as one would like to be. Promise me that you will try to forget what I have said."

At another time Eleanor might have smiled at the rapidity with which penitence followed upon error. But she was too unhappy now either to smile or to be angry ; and his half-finished declaration seemed an incident absolutely without importance in her life.

" Yes, Mr. Devine," she said, " I will promise to forget it. And now, good-bye. We will still part good friends."

And then she shook hands with him, and went out into the street, and turned her back upon the slums.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN APPEAL.

SO the great experiment was over, and Eleanor's mind was full of the strange and bitter irony of its closing scene. It followed her in her journey through the streets, and coloured all her meditations after she was home.

For here was another man who loved her, just as she had long known that Duncan Deane had loved. Love, it seemed, might be hers in abundance,—provided that it was unlawful love ; and the only love she might not have was the love that rightfully belonged to her. Her husband's heart alone was as a locked instrument on which it was forbidden to her to play. The reason ? Well, the reason had been dark to her before, but now she thought she understood it.

"It would have been just the same with any of the others if they had married me. They too would have shrunk from the temperament that could not submit itself ; they too would have found

the barrier that fences the soul that is condemned to live alone. I kept them at a distance, and they never saw it, never even knew of it. But the barrier was always there, and Walter saw it. Walter would still imagine that it was there, even if I could pull it down."

If she could pull it down! But she had pulled it down, and the way to the heart was open and clear for him to follow. It was only in his fancy that the barrier existed now,—as a mirage, so to speak, in the great waste of their wedded life; and her whole pain was that she could not purge his eyes of their illusion. That was what made her loneliness so real and terrible.

Her loneliness! The thought of it brought up another thought—a thought that had been laying firmer and firmer hold on her of late. She wondered if things would have been different for her if she had been the mother of a child, if motherhood would have taught her from the first to lose the artist in the woman, and if the presence of the little dumb thing helplessly appealing would not have stilled misunderstandings, and made her relations with her husband human.

"I was so glad, to begin with, that we had no child. I was so afraid of the commonplace cares of life. They would have interfered with me, and

I felt so strong and independent. But now—ah! now I know that I was wrong—now I would give anything to be a mother."

But this too was a thought that carried bitter reflections in its train.

"A mother! If I were a mother! And now, for two years he and I have lived in separate rooms."

A passage in a book that she had read occurred to her—that great scene in Zola's *L'Œuvre* where Christine, the painter's wife, comes from her bedroom into her husband's studio, where he is throwing wild energy into work fore-doomed to fail, and laughs his art to scorn. Life is more than art, she tells him, and love is the thing in life that really matters, and so, by main force, drags him with her to a furious make-believe of passion.

Surely an example for her if anything in literature could furnish one. And she was so used to let literature influence her life! Yet an example which it was quite impossible for her to follow. For it seemed to her that such an outburst argued either a vulgar want of dignity, or an inordinate physical desire. There was no place for it in such a love as hers.

For hers, she knew, was no simple passion of the senses. Had it been that, she told herself, she

would have known how to win him; and if she had failed to win him she would hardly have been faithful under the ordeal that she had suffered, and the temptations that she had had. Her love was something holier and higher,—a craving to find romance in the lawful round of daily life—the desire, none the less real because it had come to her so late, to fulfil her proper destiny of womanhood. And, in romance, it was not the woman's part to offer herself; it was the man's place to storm the fortress of her heart. So that she was condemned not only to suffering but to silence.

"I can't. I can't. It is he who should speak first. It is he who ought to bring his love and offer it to me."

Yet it was cruel for her to endure in silence, seeing her happiness so near, and yet so far away. Already once or twice, she had felt constrained to try to open her heart and lay it bare to him; and now, as she brooded on her misery an irresistible impulse made her speak again.

"I can't tell him. No, I can't tell him. But, oh! I must try to make him understand."

There must be no anger, no reproaches, no recriminations. She must neither claim his love as a right nor sue for it as a favour. She would first show him once again how much she wanted it,—

show him so clearly that, if he had eyes to see, and ears to hear, he could not fail to understand.

"It must be to-night. Yes, I will try to make him understand to-night."

But when the night came she was afraid. It was so hard to begin the confession when she thought of all that hung on it! and nothing happened in their talk, giving her the opening that she sought. So she put it off.

"It shall be to-morrow. I will try to make him understand to-morrow."

And so it was day after day, for many days; and when the day came at last when she broke silence, she could not help beginning with those very reproaches which she had promised to deny herself.

They were again in the little room that opened from the studio—the same room in which they had been sitting on that afternoon when she had startled him with her strange question—"It's an odd thing, Walter—is n't it?—that you and I have never fallen in love with each other."

She remembered the whole talk—remembered especially her own words at the end of it: "It's just as if each of us was waiting for the other to begin"; and the memory filled her mind with bitterness. For now she had begun, and there was no response from him.

At least, there was no response as yet, though surely she would have been less bitter if she could have read the secrets of his soul. For there she would have seen the misery of a man whose conscience troubled him, and who wrestled uneasily with himself, who knew that he had given rein unworthily to his desires; who saw the treasure that was offered to him, and perceived that it was more precious than the treasure that he pursued, and despised himself because he could not be content with it; a man who wanted to love her, and felt that she deserved that he should love her, and did not know whether to be more angry with her or with himself because he did not. And seeing that, she might have pitied him, and kept her anger down and waited. Her simplification had got thus far, at any rate.

But Eleanor knew nothing of what was passing in his mind. She only knew that she was resolved to try to make him understand, and that the opening he gave her invited violent retort.

"Don't sit up for me to-night, Eleanor," he said. "I may be late."

Simple words, but words that conveyed far more to her than he meant. He had not told her where he was going; and it was little use for her to ask, because the Club was such an easy pretext. But

she knew, or thought she knew; and it was this conjecture that gave the bitterness to her reply.

"Oh, no! I won't sit up. It would be rather an anti-climax, would n't it?—to find me waiting for you."

"What do you mean?"

He almost threw the words at her, assuming impatience to cover his confusion.

"What do I mean?"

Her eyes flashed with anger, and she drove her nails hard into the flesh of her hands in the effort to keep back her tears.

"What do I mean," she repeated, stepping towards him, and looking him straight into the face.

He expected the tempest—the dreaded tempest of recriminations and reproaches, of truths that he could not deny and accusations that he could not disprove—the tempest that would make final shipwreck even of their simulated happiness, and he had already begun to bow his head in shame before the storm.

But Eleanor's mood changed suddenly, and she stopped the indignant words that crowded to her lips.

"Never mind what I meant. Come here—come closer to me, Walter."

He came, and she wound her arms round his

neck, and drew him to her, so that he felt the passionate heaving of her bosom. It pained and shamed him terribly to find that he had no emotion commensurate with hers—that his first feelings were of relief that the tempest for the moment was averted.

Still clinging to him, Eleanor went on, trying to explain herself as she had resolved.

"I think we have n't always understood each other, Walter. I think you 've sometimes had some wrong ideas about me. You thought—did n't you?—that women who were clever, and wrote books, and talked art, could n't love and did n't care for love. I know you did. Perhaps I once used to think that myself; but I know better now. It is n't so, dear, it is n't so. We 're human beings just like other people."

His shame deepened as he listened to her pleading. Why had she not come to him and stormed his heart in that way, years and years ago, when their estrangement was only just beginning,—before he himself had taken any irrevocable step? Things would have been so different then, for both of them. Then he would never have known the tragedy of trying to love and failing; of vainly seeking to evoke a passion that would not answer to his call.

He took refuge in self-abasement.

"You 're a good woman, Eleanor,—a better woman than I deserve," he stammered out; and she replied:

"I 've tried to be good, Walter; tried harder than you think, perhaps. And I 'd have been so glad to be different—to be less complex, you know—if that would have pleased you better. Only it is so hard not to be oneself. One is as one is made."

"One is as one is made"! His own words; the words that he had so lightly used to her. But they had more meaning for him now, seeming to sum up in a phrase all the ironies of human life.

For surely it was the bitterest of ironies that he should not love his wife, when he saw that she was so beautiful, and knew that she was so good, and fond, and true. He felt it so and loathed himself,—would have been glad to kneel down and pray to God to work a miracle upon his heart.

"I 'll try to be a better husband to you than I have been, Eleanor," he said.

But it was still the voice of the sinner who repented, not of the lover who was won; and Eleanor perceived the difference, and felt her heart sink within her.

The sinner meant more than he said; and the

penitence, at least for the moment, was sincere. He was making good resolutions of which he could not speak to her because to speak of them would be to confess the sin. He would have done with his dancing girl, whatever effort it might cost him. That very night he would tell her that it had to be so—would brave her tears and her reproaches, and trample on his own regrets. And then he would come back to Eleanor, and humble himself, and try to love her as she deserved.

But Eleanor knew nothing of the resolve and could not see how near she was to victory. She only knew that her own supreme effort had been made, and that she had only moved her husband through his sense of duty.

Yet, having touched that, she would not answer angrily.

"Good-night, Walter," she said. "I won't sit up for you if you don't wish it. Kiss me before you go."

Once more she clung to him, as though she would fasten love for her upon him.

He kissed her, trying to throw into his kiss a passion that should be at least a faint echo of her own; and she was conscious alike of the effort and of the failure.

"Good-night, Walter," she said again.

"Good-night, Eleanor," he answered. "I won't be later than I can help."

Then he went out into the hall, and put on his coat, and whistled for a cab, and gave the driver the direction of Piccadilly Circus.

CHAPTER XX.

DESPAIR.

HE was gone, and the heavy slamming of the door behind him sounded to her crushed heart like the final funeral knell of hope.

" I have touched his conscience. Why, oh ! why can I never touch his heart ? "

That was the refrain of her despair ; and she said and resaid it to herself, as she lay back on the divan, pillowed by its luxurious cushions, with the soft light of the tall brass lamp beside her shedding its pink glow on her tired eyes, and colouring the pallor of her cheeks.

She thought of the other women whom she knew, and wondered how they would feel at such a crisis. The Barnstaple girls for instance ? They surely would not suffer quite as she did ? The flame of their love would flicker out for lack of fuel, and they would placidly pursue the trivial round as though nothing in particular had hap-

pened. But then the Barnstaple girls were not tormented with "artistic temperaments."

And the Pioneers? Well, Mrs. Barnes and Mrs. Brereton, she knew, had actually gone through similar experiences to hers, and had come out of the conflict scarred, but safe, resolved to go on "living their own lives" with more obtrusive zeal than ever. But Mrs. Barnes and Mrs. Brereton were strong; and Eleanor was weak, so that their example failed her at the very moment when it might have served her best, and she could only lie there murmuring the burden of her sorrow.

"I have touched his conscience? Why, oh! why can I never touch his heart?"

And she did not even know how deeply his conscience had been touched—suspected nothing more than the remorse of a moment, which would go as easily as it had come. The victory, such as it was, that she gained, was hidden from her eyes. It was not the triumph that she had sought to win; and, if she had known it, it would not have contented her. Yet, at least it would have encouraged her to persevere; that was the difference between her and Mrs. Brereton.

But he had not told her. He had not dared to tell her, because, in telling her he must confess his fault, and so build up yet another barrier

between them—the barrier of her contempt for him. Therefore she only understood that he was trying to persuade himself that he loved her, and was ashamed of himself because he felt the hollowness of the pretence.

It 's like a man trying to make himself enjoy Beethoven's symphonies, and knowing all the time that his real taste is for Opera Bouffe.

A simile of evil portent. For the man whose real taste is for Opera Bouffe, though he try for a lifetime, will never truly feel the spell of the profounder harmonies which stir the inmost souls of those who are born to understand them. He may force himself to go to the Concert Hall to listen to them, and when he comes out, he will still be glad of the piano organ in the streets.

And so, Eleanor told herself, with love. Love, to be worth anything, must spring spontaneously. The love that was given as a duty—like a wedding present that the donor could not quite afford—was not a love worth having ; and the transformation of the one love to the other was hardly to be looked for, now that the age of miracles was over. Therefore she despaired, saying to herself that there was more chance for the merest stranger than for her to move his heart.

" It 's very good of him to try. But love does n't

come by trying any more than genius does. My love for him, did n't come by trying. It came by accident."

It had come truly by a shameful and bitter accident—an accident that might just as well have made her hate him. Yet she could not wish that it had made her hate him, even though she knew that, if it had, she would have suffered less. And in any case it did not matter what she wished, seeing that her hatred was under her control as little as her love,—that both alike were unexpected and inevitable.

And yet not quite inevitable. In a sense, she knew, she was paying the penalty of her own mistake. If only she had understood at the beginning that it is a nobler thing to be a womanly woman than to be an artist, then, she felt, she would have been spared this self-abasement,—this torturing struggle with her destiny. Only it was cruel to fail after having fought so desperately.

"I tried so hard, I was so patient. It seems so cruel that I could n't simplify myself."

And now there was the bitterness of that failure to aggravate her other sorrow with its own pang of self-contempt. She loved Walter, but she had failed to simplify herself. . . . He liked doll-women ; and she could not make herself a doll-woman for his

sake. Do what she would, endeavour as she might, the old complexity—the old "artistic temperament"—always returned again, even when she fancied, for an instant, that she was rid of it; and for him she was still the woman to respect, and to admire, and to be proud of, and not the woman in whose arms he would be glad to forget everything else in earth and heaven.

Thus every fresh thought deepened her despair. Her heart seemed, as it were, to be slowly freezing in her breast, and she could not even shed a tear to melt it. Burying her face in the crimson cushions, she tried to cry, but could not.

She knew how the tears would relieve her, and she tried to bring them by fixing her mind upon the details of the wrong her husband did her. She pictured him hurrying to his assignation, imagined the kisses and the loving words that waited for him there, imagined him thinking of her only as an obstacle planted in his path to happiness. And still her eyes were dry, and she was denied the simple woman's remedy for grief.

"My God! My God! How is it to end?" she wailed; and springing to her feet, in her torment, paced the room till she was weary, and then sank down again upon the cushions.

The hour was getting late, and presently the

maid-servant knocked at the door, and entered. She had taken up the hot water. Would her mistress require anything else before she went to bed.

"Nothing, thank you, Janet. You can put out the lamp here. I'm going to bed at once. Your master has the latch-key."

Then she went upstairs to her bedroom. But not to bed. Sleep, with her nerves in that state, was not to be seriously looked for. Presently, perhaps, if sleep were still impossible, she might use the morphine that the doctor had given her for her neuralgia. But just now she only wanted to think—to go on thinking.

She partially undressed herself, more out of habit than for the sake of ease, putting her feet into her soft satin slippers, and drawing the combs out of her hair, so that it fell like a glorious golden cataract about her back and shoulders. Standing before the mirror, she took some of its tresses in her hand, and shook them so that she could see them glisten in the gaslight.

"Oh! yes, it's beautiful hair," she murmured. "If I'd been a doll-woman I suppose he would have liked to play with it."

But he had never played with it,—at least not for a long time; and now that she thought about it, she could understand the reason why.

"I was too dignified, too much like a creature from another world. He did n't like to treat me like a child. It would have seemed a sacrilege."

With that thought in her mind, she soon tired of admiring the long tresses, and letting them fall again into their place, unhooked her pale blue cashmere dressing-gown from its peg, and wrapping it round her, lay down upon the couch that was beside her bed, and gave herself again to torturing reverie.

In this room had happened all the great crises of her mental life. Here she had conceived and written out that morbid novel which had brought about her passing notoriety. It was here that she was working when it had flashed upon her in the solemn silence of the midnight that art could not fill her life, and that the things that really mattered were quite other than the things she had supposed to matter. Here, on a later day, when her troubles were more actual and definite, had come her sudden resolve that she would simplify herself. And here she came at last to face the black despair born of the knowledge of her failure.

It was so complete—that failure, bringing no reconciliation, broadening the gulf between their souls instead of bridging it. While she was herself—dignified, full of her own art, and critical of

his—at least her husband was glad to have her friendship. When she had pretended the frivolity that sat so strangely on her, she had felt that she came near losing even that. His fancy for frivolity had limits.

"He thought one doll-woman was enough. The second only jarred on him."

And not only had she failed to win him by frivolity. Her earnestness—her pursuit of the actualities of life—had been just as ineffectual. If only those actualities had interested her for their own sake. But they had not. They had left her neurotic, self-centred, as they had found her, and the door of hope seemed to be shut on her whichever way she turned.

The fancy seized her to take down *Terre Vierge* from the shelf, and re-read the painful story of Alexis Nejdanoff—the story that had had so strong and yet so useless an influence upon her life. It would be a certain luxury of woe if only she could make herself cry over it again.

One effect upon her thoughts the reading of it must inevitably have. It must direct them to the morphine that was in the medicine chest—the morphine that the doctor had given her for her neuralgia—the morphine that she was sure she would have to take in any case if she was to sleep that

night,—the morphine that might so easily send her to sleep for ever.

She knew this, but she did not struggle. It did not seem worth while to struggle. She had struggled against so many things that she was tired of struggling.

Turning over the pages dreamily as she lay there on the couch, she found the passage that she wanted—the passage that summed up in six lines the tragedy of the young enthusiast's futile life. It comes in the letter that his friends found beside him after he was dead.

"*Je n'ai su me simplifier. Il ne me restaie plus qu'à me biffer tout à fait. J'aurais été un fardeau et pour toi et pour moi. Marianne, tu es généreuse, tu aurais peut-être supporté ce fardeau comme un nouveau sacrifice, mais je n'avais pas le droit de te l'imposer. Tu as mieux et davantage à faire.*"

She paused there, and reaching to her desk for a lead pencil, marked the margin with it. Under the words "*il ne me restait plus qu'à me biffer tout à fait,*" she drew another and a heavier line; and then rested the book upon her lap and mused.

"Yes, yes. Alexis Nejdanoff was right. *Se biffer*—to obliterate oneself—there was no other way for him."

Pausing an instant on the words, she drew her inference.

" And if there was no other way for him, what other way is there for me? What other way than death?"

Even as she spoke she knew that there were other ways,—better, braver, and nobler ways. Better to steel herself, and live her trouble down, as Mrs. Brereton had done, rejoicing in her strength. Better to be defiant, and claim emancipation in the Court. Better, above all, to go back to the slums, where her life would be useful, even if it were not happy. But this was the line of least resistance, and therefore she was drawn to it.

With the morphine too, it would be so simple, so easy and painless. To die in that way did not call for courage. For morphine was not like arsenic or strichnine. There were no agonising pangs forcing a repentance when the deed was done; but one died leisurely and beautifully, believing that one passed from a world where all was well to a world where all was going to be better.

Moving almost mechanically, and guided more by instinct than by conscious thought, she got up from the couch, and took the tiny syringe from the medicine chest, and held it in her fingers, looking at it and toying with it. She pricked her

finger with the needle, the smart of the scratch gave her pain and she stopped to think again.

Was there any reason for which it was worth her while to go on living? She could think of none. For the things she had been used to live for were worth nothing to her now; her ears were deaf to the voice that told her that there were things she ought to live for; and the things she would have been glad to live for—the things that mattered—were things that she could never have.

So she would not listen when conscience whispered its suggestion, reminding her once more that the world was full of poor and miserable people, and that she might still live and consecrate her life to them.

Had she not sought happiness among the poor and wretched, and had not the dark places in her soul got darker at the very time when she was labouring for them? What claim, then, had they upon her life?

"They may be miserable," she murmured, "but I think the most wretched of them have never known such misery as mine."

A sorry argument. But she was tired and it convinced her; and then she was resolved; and there was only one thing left for her to think of.

Ought she not to write something—to leave

some message to explain the motive of her death ?

Perhaps. Yet why ? No one could claim the right to any explanation. It was doubtful even whether anyone would understand the explanation if she gave it.

A thought struck her. She picked up *Terre Vierge* again, and opened it at the page that she had marked.

"Suppose I leave it open by my side. It 's as good a message as another—truer than anything that I should write," she said, and made her preparations quickly.

It seemed more natural to die in the dark ; so she turned down the gas, so that only a faint blue glimmer of it showed, and then stretched herself upon the bed, with the open book lying at her elbow and grasping the syringe firmly in her fingers, drove the point of the needle into her white flesh, and pushed the piston home.

The drowsiness came upon her quickly. Her troubles began to seem like the sentimental memory of something that happened so long ago that it hardly concerned her any more. Beautiful visions hovered vaguely before her eyes ; beautiful thoughts thronged confusedly through her brain. Once, for a second, she remembered herself, and her lips

faintly murmured the old phrase, *Je n'ai pas su me simplifier ;* but then conscious thought lost itself again in the dim sensation of infinite weariness satisfied with perfect rest, and she felt her tossed soul merging in the calm of the Universal and Eternal Soul, and knew that she had reached simplicity at last.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOO LATE.

AND even while Eleanor lay there in her bedroom, the glaze upon her eyes, and the cold creeping upwards to her heart, Walter was hurrying home to her, battling sternly with himself.

He had kept his resolve. The words which he had promised himself to speak were spoken ; he had told the dancing girl that henceforth he and she must live their lives apart.

It had been hard for him,—very hard ; and that though the dancing girl had acted in the one way that should have made it easier. For the shock had pierced the shallow surface of her refinement ; and in this hour of her indignation, she once more showed herself to him, coarse and common,—incapable of reticence, but capable of oaths and ugly words.

"You don't love ? It 's a lie, I tell you, and you know quite well that it 's a lie."

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That was the beginning and the end of her outbreak; and truly her love for him was genuine enough. But she garnished it with the words that it shocks a man to hear from woman's lips,—the words that disillusion a man even though he allows her to use them readily, and is aware that he has done sufficient to provoke them.

So the scene had been terrible,—almost more terrible than he could bear; and it was only the memory of the sad face and the hungry eyes waiting for him at home that hindered him from yielding to her passion, and throwing his resolution to the winds, and saying again in that favourite phrase of hers that they would "just let things drift." But, if it was terrible then, it was still more terrible when, as the night wore on, Dora's passion calmed itself a little, and she too surrendered to what she saw was bound to be.

"Go, then," she said. "You 've made two lives wretched, perhaps three. Still I suppose it 's better so."

Then it was over; and he drove back to Kensington battling with himself—resolved to love Eleanor, assured that she was worthier of his love than any other woman in the world—yet with the dazed sense that a man feels when he stands on the steamer-deck, after the last farewells, seeing

the happiness that he was sure of receding slowly from his eyes, confident that any new happiness that he may find in the new world he goes to cannot equal it.

The cab stopped outside the studio, and he entered. Everything was as usual there. There was no sign to warn him that anything untoward —anything abnormal had occurred. He lit the candle that was left for him in the hall, and stole upstairs quietly so that no one might be disturbed.

He tossed restlessly on his bed, thinking of the shameful past and of the uncertain future. They would go away somewhere together,—he and Eleanor. Cut adrift from all the old associations, they should learn to love and know each other, in some romatic *châlet* on the Bel Alp, or in the shady garden of some villa on the Lake of Como. Surely they could not fail to love each other there, whatever might have happened, if they both tried hard.

Thus he was pondering when a troubled sleep came to him at last; and the same thoughts still pursued him in his dreams when in the early morning, a sudden knock came at his door, and a scared maid-servant opened it.

"Please, sir, I think the mistress is ill, and you 'd better come to her at once."

He was glad of the shock he felt. Never before

would any tidings of her illness so have thrilled him. Springing from his bed, he clutched at his dressing gown, threw it round him, and hastened to her room, where she was lying stretched upon her bed.

The newly risen sun was streaming through the blind upon her face. Its fearful paleness frightened him. He put his hand upon her heart and found it still. He saw the tiny puncture on her fore-arm, and the silver syringe fallen on the floor, and understood.

"You can leave me," he said, and the servant went, closing the door after her noiselessly.

Then his eyes fell upon the open book lying beside her, with the passage triply scored with pencil marks. He took it up with trembling hands, and read through what she had marked.

"*Je n'ai pas su me simplifier. Il ne me restait plus qu'à me biffer tout à fait.*"

That was enough. There was no need for him to read any further words. Eleanor had explained herself to him at last, and at last he understood the explanation.

"My God!"

The cry broke from him in his anguish, as he stood, with his hands clasped, and his head bowed, and his eyes looking down, through the gathering tears, upon her face.

"My God! How she must have loved me! And how I would have loved her if I had only known!"

For there was no thought now of the dancing girl whom he had left. He felt himself in the presence of a holier love than hers,—a love that never could be coarse or common, but thrilled every chord in his spiritual being, and taught him for the first time, what love might really mean.

"She said she thought she would be more to me, if she were a simpler woman. And I never understood her! Oh, my God! My God!"

But he understood now. For Eleanor had simplified herself. Those barriers that had grown up between their souls were broken down. All the rich wealth of womanliness that was in her was revealed to him, and the impulse had come to him at last to clasp her in his arms and hold her there for ever.

"Oh! Eleanor, I love you! And now you can never hear me tell my love."

And then he bent down over her, where she lay, and threw the loose auburn hair about his face, and kissed the violet eyes as he had never kissed them in her life.

THE END

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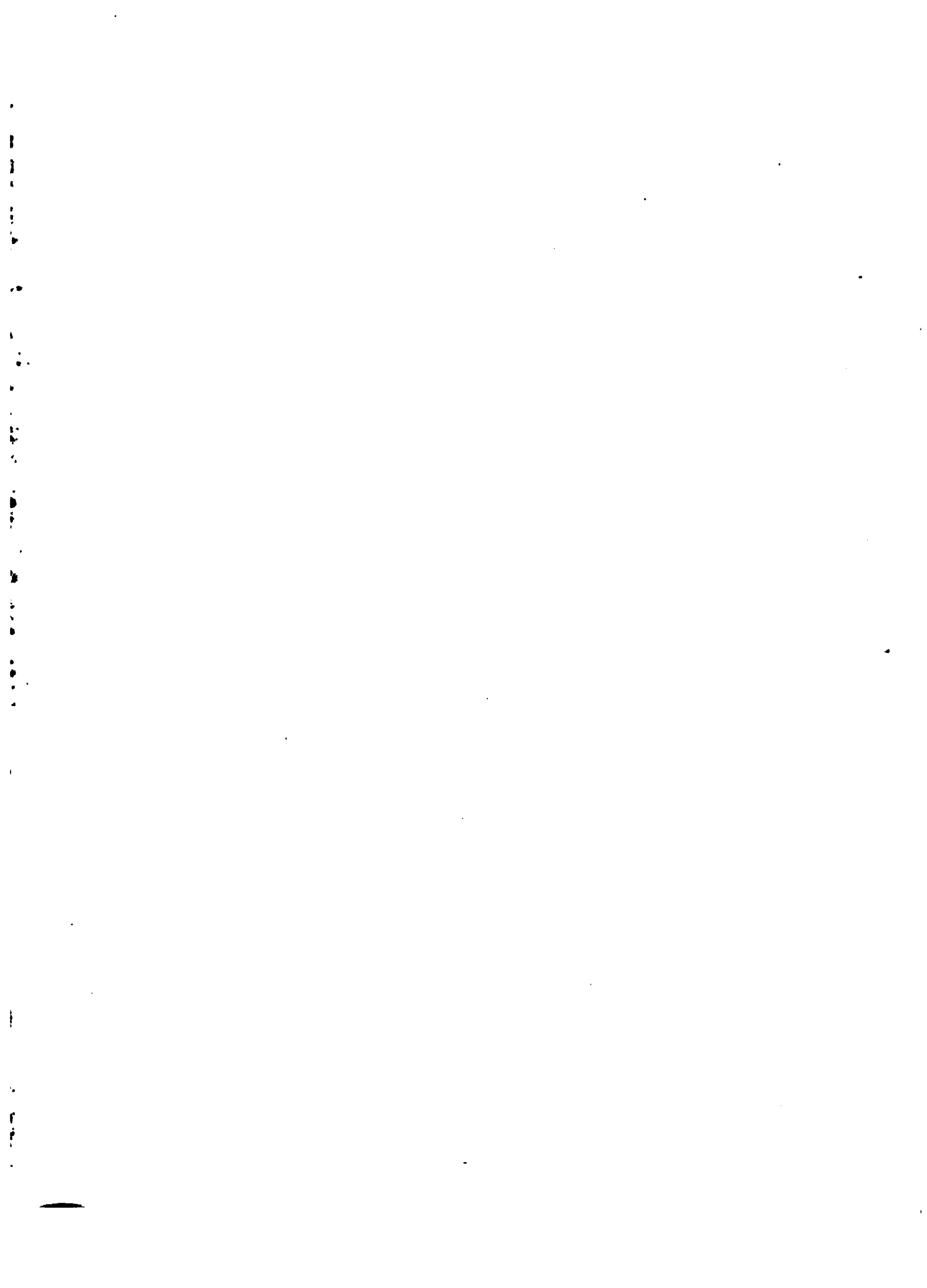

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